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The Cultures of History in Early Modern India

Persianization and Mughal Culture in Bengal



KUMKUM CHATTERJEE

THE CULTURES OF HISTORY IN EARLY MODERN INDIA

Persianization and Mughal Culture in Bengal

This book examines the nature and function of history-writing in India by focusing on early modern traditions of historiography with particular reference to Bengal. Situating distinctive cultures of history vis- a-vis their relevant political and cultural contexts, this volume highlights the richness, variety and politically-sensitive character of a range of oral and textual narratives.

Kumkum Chatterjee also makes a significant contribution to the intellectual and cultural history of early modern India by exploring interactions between regional, vernacular cultures on the one hand and the Islamicate, Persianized culture of the Mughal Empire on the other.

Strongly grounded in primary sources, *The Cultures of History in Early Modern India* re-examines the concepts of authority, evidence, and method in early modern historiography. It also discusses the debates surrounding the culture of history writing in India. On account of the range of issues it raises, this book will be important for scholars and students of Mughal and early modern India, particularly those

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For
Kalyan

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Acknowledgements

This book represents many years of thinking and research about a topic which I continue to find fascinating. The genesis of it began many years ago when I read an article by Partha Chatterjee entitled 'Itihaser Uttaradhikar' which appeared in *Baromas*, April 1991.[1] My views on the nature and function of history, particularly in early modern India are different in some respects from those of Partha da. But, then, it is easier to be critical when someone else has laid out a pioneering research trail.

I have incurred many intellectual, professional, and personal debts in the course of researching and writing this book. Above all, I thank my teachers, Professor Gautam Bhadra and Professor Rajat Kanta Ray for their affection and interest in my work and the examples they have set for me through their own erudition and scholarship. I hope I have tried at least to come as close as possible to the high standards they have set. Many other friends and mentors have supported me through the years. Among them, I would like in particular to mention Chris Bayly, Sugata Bose, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Michael Fisher, Stewart Gordon, David Ludden, Rochona Majumdar, and Anand Yang. I am fortunate that much of the time spent in working on this book coincided with a new wave of energy and interest in pre-modern South Asian history—particularly for the early modern period. I cannot adequately emphasize the intellectual debts I owe a large community of medievalists and early modernists of different persuasions, that is, historians, literary scholars, and art historians for providing stimulation, inspiration, provocation, and much food for thought. In conferences, workshops, and through personal interaction, they have been sounding boards for new ideas and critics of untenable ones. These fellow-travellers on

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to work on this book project. A senior fellowship from the American Institute of Indian Studies (2004) helped enormously in making possible several months of research in Kolkata and Bishnupur.

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Note

1. This article was reprinted in several other places and included in Partha Chatterjee, *Itihaser Uttaradhikar*, Kolkata, 2000. An English translation of this article appeared as 'The Nation and Its Histories', in Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton, 1993.

Note on Transliteration and Usage

Diacritical marks have not been used on the assumption that readers familiar with Indian languages do not need them and others do not find them particularly useful.

I have used the conventional Sanskritized spellings for Bengali words rather than spellings based on their pronunciation on the assumption that most readers are much more familiar with the former.

For Persian words, I have consulted the *Comprehensive Persian–English Dictionary* by F. J. Steingass (London, 1957), and have used the standard transliterated forms found in contemporary scholarship.

In the bibliography and endnotes I have retained the transliteration and spellings used by the authors of works (in all languages) cited there.

The translation of Bengali passages into English, unless otherwise indicated, is mine.

Introduction

Who else but poets resembling prajapatis [in creative power]
and able to bring forth beautiful compositions,
can place the past times before the eyes of men?[1]

'When the Imperial standards were for the first time borne aloft in the garden of perpetual spring', wrote Abul Fazl in the *Ain-i-Akbari*, 'a book called *Rajatarangini* written in the Sanskrit tongue containing an account of the princes of Kashmir during a period of some four thousand years was presented to His Majesty'.[2] Abul Fazl was writing about the Mughal conquest of Kashmir in 1586 and about the emperor Akbar's entry there as its new ruler. The gift of the *Rajatarangini* to Akbar underscores the perceived importance of history as a necessary requisite for the effective exercise of political power. Kings needed to know about the past experiences of their subjects, about lines of prior rulers and acts of governance associated with the latter. These were valuable both as points of reference and as an archive of memory. As historical productions of pre-modern societies, not just in India, but from all over the world indicate, it was not just kings who were interested in the actions of their predecessors, subjects too considered their rulers and acts of royal policy to be pre-eminent topics of history.[3] Narratives about kings and their actions do not, of course, exhaust the substantive topics covered by pre-modern history, but they comprise a common and conventional subject of historical discourse.

The core theme of this book involves an exploration of the cultures of history writing in early modern Bengal. The seventeenth, eighteenth, and the first decade or so of the nineteenth centuries provide the temporal framework for this study—a period which witnessed the

consolidation of the Mughal political and cultural order, its subsequent political decline and the transition to early colonial rule. A related theme which runs through the book is the connection between culture and the production of history and specifically, between a Persianized Mughal political culture and history writing. The linguistic-cultural region of Bengal serves as the reference point for the exploration of these themes. The debates and soul-searching among professional historians in contemporary times about the dilemmas of accepting or rejecting the notion of history as a modern and liberal practice based on universal and rational principles are well known. For the early modern period (and generally for all pre-modern periods), as practitioners and audiences of the art and craft of history understood quite clearly, the narrative modes through which history was presented were firmly grounded in the conventions and styles of the linguistic and literary registers in which they were articulated. The study, thus, of early modern Indian/Bengali historiography makes sense in the context of the polity, society, and culture in which they were produced.

Linked to the two themes mentioned above is the issue of the cultural environment in which history was produced and used. The Persianized political culture associated with the Mughal imperial state represented a cultural formation which transcended the South Asian subcontinent and was current in many parts of the Islamic world during the medieval and early modern periods. The focus of this study, on the nexus between history writing and culture, also brings us to an issue which is significant both historically as well as in today's context. This touches upon the question of the interaction and relationship among Islamic culture and diverse non-Islamic cultural traditions that the former encountered in various parts of the world. In the context of this book, this topic is discussed with particular reference to an Islamicate culture associated in the South Asian subcontinent with Mughal rule and a range of regional traditions rooted in Bengal.

Composing History

The commemoration of the past constitutes one of the basic and most ubiquitous of human endeavours from ancient times. As Michel de Certeau, among others, notes, all history is actually about the present.[4] It is a dialogue of the present with the past. The past enabled its consumers to situate themselves vis-à-vis peoples, events, and things which had existed earlier and thereby, created antecedents for their

present identities, values, and preoccupations. History, therefore, in its most general sense, constitutes a form of remembrance and also a sense of rootedness because it provides pathways back to the origins whether of a lineage, a person, or a royal dynasty. Its very nature as the medium through which events and processes of past times, together with their outcomes, are remembered makes it eminently appropriate to be a repository of cautionary tales and morals. If the term culture is taken in its broadest sense to denote those practices and ideas which help to make sense of the world, then the connection between history and culture becomes obvious since history constitutes an important medium through which we can understand the present world better, particularly in the context of its past.

The rationale for a study of early modern/late pre-colonial historiography lies in the fact that an exploration of the nature, substantive content and function of history writing allows us to gain valuable insights into the cultural and intellectual parameters of such societies. Such an endeavour also opens up the cultural and literary idioms through which history was articulated. This is particularly significant in the case of South Asia where certain types of scholarship oriented to the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have tended to characterize pre-colonial India as a sort of featureless terrain whose main function seems to have been to serve as a foil and contrast to the colonial period.[5] There is no question of minimizing the significant transformations brought about by colonial rule to key areas of Indian society, culture, and economy. However, to view the period prior to colonialism as mainly a foil to what followed, is to ignore the richness, distinctiveness, and dynamism of the centuries prior to the onset of a colonial modernity. An emergent corpus of recent scholarship on early medieval, medieval, and early modern India has served to stimulate and re-energize the study of these eras by moving away from the convention of writing chronologically-structured dynastic histories or concentrating exclusively on the history of administrative institutions. This body of work also serves to underscore the importance of understanding the literary and cultural idioms of these societies.[6] Yet, the predilection to use modern notions and concepts to characterize pre-modern eras may not yet have been laid completely to rest. Such characterizations, I suspect, lie at the heart of the many centuries-old view that pre-colonial India lacked the ability to write proper history which arrived on the subcontinent as a 'cargo cult'[7] associated with the modernizing effects of British rule. Much of pre-colonial—and, in the case of this book,

early modern—history writing is still defined in terms of this critique. Hence it is necessary to first engage in a discussion of such views before embarking on an effort to describe early modern historiography in India/Bengal on its own terms.

The Critique of Pre-Modern Indian Historiography

British colonialist writers and commentators recognized that India possessed ancient traditions to write about the past. These, however, were loose, untidy, and irrational narratives which fell far short of qualifying for the status of proper history. The modern concept of history as a scientific and rational intellectual practice, which developed in academic institutions, is usually traced back to nineteenth century Europe and is regarded, above all, as a quest for 'past reality' based on rational, verifiable evidence which had to be judged by deploying a carefully cultivated objectivity.[8]

This understanding of history created a boundary between western professional history writing on the one hand and the multiple traditions of commemorating the past that it encountered around the world. From Latin America to Asia, Africa, and elsewhere, traditions about the past produced by these societies were deemed to be unworthy of being treated as history.[9] India was placed among all those societies which had been incapable of generating their own cultures of proper history writing. Neither did European observers of the nineteenth century enjoy a monopoly in the exercise of remarking on this inadequacy of Indian society. Many centuries earlier, Al-Biruni had expressed similar opinions about the alleged inability of Indians to produce history.[10]

The establishment of British colonial rule over India made it necessary for the English East India Company's government to take an interest in the state of, or, in their view, the lack of appropriate historiographical cultures in India as part of a broader interest in the culture and intellectual traditions of its subjects. British writers such as James Mill, William Ward, Thomas Babington Macaulay, and others expressed disdain about the inability of Indians to write proper history[11] and extended it to draw further deductions regarding the nature of Indians and Indian culture, that is, the lack of reason and scientific temperament among Indians generally, especially Hindus, the excessive influence of religion which inclined Indians to resort to religious myths, the despotic nature of the Indian state and the oppressive hierarchical nature of its society. In any case, the perceived lack of proper histories of India motivated British colonial officials, scholars, and commentators about India to launch a

programme of writing what they considered to be the first 'scientific', rational and, therefore, modern histories of the subcontinent.

These colonialist histories also became models or templates—mainly methodological—for the emergent class of Indian, colonial middle class literati. Disseminated, not exclusively, but primarily through the institutions of colonial education, the notion of history as a rational-positivist discipline exerted considerable influence on the middle class in India, particularly during the mid to later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. With the emergence of the first generation of professional Indian historians and scholars who were trained in modern, western-style universities which had developed in India during the nineteenth century, this methodology became the basic premise for the production of academic histories of India which could measure up to current standards that had been put in place for history writing. To this generation of professional Indian historians too, the older pre-modern materials which had circulated in India for centuries, that is, the Puranas, ancient and medieval chronicles, and genealogies of royal dynasties, and such others underscored the lack of a proper historical tradition in ancient and medieval India.[12] By the yardstick of reason, objectivity, and factuality these fell into the category of ancient traditions, myths, and folklore. A similar trend is noticeable among middle class intelligentsia in almost all colonial and semi-colonial societies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and also in regions such as Turkey or Japan.[13]

Discussions about history continued to revolve largely around its manifestation as one of the symptoms of colonial modernity, until a distinguished body of more recent scholarship alerted us to its potential as a powerful site for national and cultural self-expression during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This corpus of writings demonstrated that under colonial conditions in India, the writing of history became a contested terrain between the colonial state and its associates on the one hand and its middle-class Indian subjects on the other. The works of Ranajit Guha, Partha Chatterjee, Sudipta Kaviraj, and Dipesh Chakrabarty transformed the topic of history writing in colonial India from an isolated, perhaps somewhat dry, topic of study to one whose vital possibilities for the articulation of a nationalist identity and imagination were revealed.[14] Indeed, the construction of an Indian historical past—in keeping with the disciplinary parameters of history as an evidence-based, rational, and objective practice—by the nationalist Indian literati became at once the manifestation as well as the site of

India's nationhood. The discourse about the nature and character of Indian history, whether emanating from colonialist writers, professional Indian historians and scholars of the early twentieth century, or more recent post-modernist scholarship, converge on the issue of its 'new-ness' vis-à-vis the mass of history-like materials which had circulated in India as a poor surrogate for true history during the many centuries preceding the beginning of colonial rule. Thus, the two latter groups of scholars also accept, as colonialist observers did, that pre-nineteenth century India lacked a proper historical consciousness. It emerged in India as a result of conditions created by colonialism and it was methodologically derived from western, metropolitan concepts of formal disciplinary history as an evidence-based, rational, scientific knowledge-practice. Its potential for Indian nationalism lay in the use that was made of it by the nationalist bourgeoisie. The literature on nationalist Indian historiography also characterizes it as representative of a rupture with earlier indigenous traditions and modes of commemorating the past. In fact, the Indian cultural and intellectual environment in this respect is portrayed implicitly as a sort of blank slate on which colonialism introduced its own unmediated impact in terms of history writing.[15] Consequently, the possibility of the interaction of earlier pre-modern modes of commemorating the past with the modern rational practice of history writing was effectively precluded for the most part.

Pre-Modern Indian Historiography

This study derives from a perceived need to interrogate the assumptions about the nature of pre-modern Indian historiography discussed above—in this case, with reference to Bengal during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and very early nineteenth centuries—and to show that the forms, style, and content of history writing during this period were closely linked to contingent cultural imperatives. Colonialist writers, and other scholars who have provided insights about the flowering of a nationalist historiography, have defined history in terms of its modern incarnation as an objective, rational, and academic discipline. In projecting this concept backwards, one is bound perhaps to come up with little that corresponds identically to the state of historiography during the early modern period. As Marshall Sahlins writes, 'if the past is a foreign country, then it is another culture'.[16] In the Indian case, this led to the characterization of pre-modern historiography as a practice that was characterized by its 'lack', that is, its inadequacy with respect to what it was expected to be. Rao-Shulman-Subrahmanyam

accurately point out that earlier modes of commemorating the past need to be understood on their own terms, in the context of their own milieus and literary-cultural and political environments.[17] This is a more sensitive way of understanding these materials rather than divorcing them from their material and cultural environments and attempting then to measure them in terms of criteria that were anterior to them or external to them, or both. It is indeed true that the turn of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth saw the crystallization of a methodologically and institutionally different kind of history from the regimes of historiography that held sway earlier. It cannot be automatically assumed that pre-modern India did not possess a historical consciousness. By that token, almost all societies in pre-modern times lacked a clearly rational-positivist sense of history.

If history is seen, particularly for the pre-nineteenth century period—not in terms of the formal, academic definition of it that emerged in European universities in the later nineteenth century—but merely as a set of practices that were used to commemorate the past, then it leaves open the possibility of envisioning it in terms of multiple cultures that were rooted in the narrative styles and conventions unique to the cultural and political contexts in which they were composed. The scholarly literature and its critiques of pre-modern Indian historiography referred to above, posit a distinction exclusively between the pre-modern lack of history on the one hand and the hegemony of formal academic history on the other. However, what gets excluded from this critique is the recognition that even in contemporary times, there is a large sphere of history which cannot be restricted by the formal academic definition of it. This is a point to which I shall return at the very end of the book. An emergent body of scholarship on pre-modern Indian historiography has eroded some of the earlier generalizations about modes of history writing prior to the nineteenth century. I refer here to the works of Rao-Shulman-Subrahmanyam, Cynthia Talbot, Sumit Guha, Prachi Deshpande, Ramya Sreenivasan, and others. [18]

Indian epistemologies do not contain any term or concept which corresponds totally to the modern notion of history as a rational, objective knowledge-practice linked to certain specific methodological protocols. The terms that are closest to it from within the Indic tradition and possibly some of the most ancient are *itihasa* and *Purana*. Etymologically derived as *iti ha asa* or, 'thus it was', itihasa, from very ancient times, denoted a body of stories about past times and past events. The term 'Purana' generally meant ancient or old, but more

specifically, indicated literature which contained accounts of kings, sages, and such others of ancient times. Many other terms and concepts bearing near-synonymous meanings in different vernacular Indian languages were also used to narrate accounts of past times. From around the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Islamic tradition of *tarikh* writing—typically a tradition of chronologically recording the reigns of successive rulers—entered India and enjoyed a vigorous career in the Indian subcontinent for many centuries. A more detailed genealogy of the ranges of meanings associated with itihasa, Purana, tarikh and their evolution has been sketched out in Chapter 1 which discusses the most characteristic features of pre-modern historiography in general terms.

Itihasa in pre-modern India was not a specialized practice associated exclusively with formal institutions of higher learning. As Rao-Shulman-Subrahmanyam insightfully point out, it was not a *shastra* (a formal intellectual discipline), it was not associated with a fixed genre (prose/verse) or form (biography, chronicle, annal, and others), and it was not necessarily practised by specialists.[19] It was manifest in a variety of languages, genres, and forms but not identifiable by a specialized methodology. As Romila Thapar observes, it was a practice which was 'embedded' in various kinds of narratives, thereby sometimes rendering it difficult for modern readers, accustomed to regarding history as a self-contained exclusive discipline, to identify it in materials which defied such characterization.[20] The closeness of itihasa, in fact its virtual sameness with *kavya* or literature, further reinforces this difficulty for readers with modern sensibilities. The current tendency to distinguish between 'literature', understood most generally as fictional narrative, and 'history' as a rational-positivist academic discipline seems inappropriate for pre-modern historiography. Even if one does not go so far as accepting Hayden White's virtual reduction of history to a form of rhetoric,[21] many contemporary historians are probably not uncomfortable about recognizing a degree of literariness about the historians' craft. The late nineteenth and early twentieth century concept of history as scientific and uncompromisingly factual perhaps made it inevitable that ancient, medieval, and early modern modes of history writing, in their capacity as kavya (poetic literature) would be deemed unacceptable. Kavya was also expected to appeal to the emotions—the Sanskrit literary tradition is associated with a distinguished theory of poetic aesthetics (*rasa*). Here too lay a major distinction between the conceptualization of history as rational and objective science on the one hand and the close, virtual inseparability of pre-modern historiography with kavya.

Much of the commentary on the a-historical nature of Indian historiographical traditions prior to the nineteenth century seems to be based on the epic and Puranic literature, that is, narratives which, through repeated tellings over centuries, came to embody tradition (*aitihya*) itself. In these materials, time is indeed perceived to be cyclical and composed of giant chronological units which were different for the gods, human beings, and demons. The protagonists in these materials, similarly, were not restricted to the human species, but accommodated a variety of other beings. The plots of these narratives were characterized by layers of nested stories within them. The 'original' authors of these stories were perceived to be sages, themselves the subject of many stories and traditions. The powerful influence of epic-Puranic traditions on historiographic narratives in pre-modern India does not require reiteration here. However, this commentary overlooks the inherent diversity and heterogeneity of Indian historiographical cultures. These included biographical narratives about kings, sages, heads of lineages, continuous chronicles which recorded the reigns of successive generations of kings, and materials which recorded quotidian administrative practices, as well as the evolution of political and social institutions. Ancient and medieval historiography was not only couched in the form of the Puranas and the epics, but in a variety of forms. The terms used to describe these forms were also vast and varied and differed from one region to another; these forms themselves were neither timeless, nor unchanging, and could moreover perform different cultural and political functions over time.[22] Even truly ancient materials, such as the Puranas, for example, which are regarded as embodying aitihya, have to be examined much more critically instead of accepting at face value their claims to be unchanging.

The Indo-Persian tarikh tradition which enjoyed a long and vigorous life within the Indian subcontinent and was a primary mode of commemorating the political/administrative acts of rulers together with their moral/ethical principles of governance has most often been treated as a category of narrative that is separate from the various others mentioned above. What lies behind this tendency is the proclivity to treat epics, Puranas, *vamshavalis*, *charitras*, and such others in Sanskrit and the various regional vernaculars as representative of Hindu or Indian historiographical traditions, while the tarikhs, associated historically with Muslim rulers in India, are treated separately as though they cannot be placed under the Indian label. Furthermore, scholars who have typically written about pre-modern historical cultures have explicitly and

implicitly adopted the position that there existed two separate cultural and intellectual traditions in India. As manifest in historiography, they were embodied by the Indian/Hindu forms on the one hand and by the Indo-Islamic tarikh form on the other and the possibilities of interaction between them have received little or no attention.

Pre-modern historiography is also contrasted vis-à-vis the perceived attributes of the modern, scientific-empirical practice of history. These points of contrast are many and range from the former's lack of proper methodology, lack of a clear demarcation between the factual and the fantastic, lack of connection to contingent material concerns, the notion of cyclical time, and the use of verse rather than the exclusive use of prose, and many others. The discussion in the subsequent chapters underscores the need to modify and adjust many of these notions. For now, it is enough to point out that pre-modern historiography was not oblivious of methodology and concepts of authority; evidence and the qualifications of the author were acknowledged to be important. However, these can be appreciated only through an understanding of pre-modern notions and conventions which were not identical to those current in the modern academy. Regarding the absence of a clear demarcation between the factual and the fantastic, Rao-Sulman-Subrahmanyam suggest that contemporary audiences were able to determine such matters by what they term the 'texture' of the narrative, that is, textual markers comprising syntax, lexical choices, metrical devices, and the like.[23] The concept of texture has its critics.[24] But, it is also true that a contemporary audience would be much more sensitive and attuned to distinguishing between factuality and the fantastic in narrative texts than us. More importantly, the uses and functions of pre-modern historiographical narratives varied according to genre and the immediate context. A matter of fact recording of dynastic succession would certainly not be read in the same manner as the telling of the exploits of a deity. The notion of cyclical time is upheld by critics of pre-modern history as yet another instance of the irrational and a factor that may have impeded the development of proper history in India.[25] In certain types and forms of pre-modern narratives, time was indeed represented as looping around in giant spans. But such characterization misses the point that linear, diachronic time was often paired with a cyclical chronology and that each performed different functions. Hayden White associates pre-modern historical writing with the annal and chronicle forms, both of which, in his characterization, aspired to narrativity, but typically failed to achieve it. The full-blown historical narrative, by contrast, succeeded in achieving

a narrative closure and was characterized by 'a well-marked beginning, middle and end phases'.[26] In White's view, the annal and the chronicle fell short of being admitted to the realm of proper history but functioned as steps leading to the efflorescence of genuine history. This book shows that chronicles and texts which achieved narrative closure coexisted contemporaneously and, therefore, it is not valid to regard them as representing successive stages of historical consciousness. It is more useful to acknowledge their simultaneous existence, but to be aware that they may well have performed different historiographic functions.

The points discussed above provide detailed points of contrast between history in its modern sense vis-à-vis its pre-modern incarnation. But the broadest, and possibly one of the best-known distinctions, drawn between history and something which is not history, but resembles it, revolves around the attempts to distinguish between history and memory. Starting with Maurice Halbwachs in the 1920s to the more recent work of Idith Zertal and others,[27] the history/memory debate posits the distinction between the two in terms of naturalness versus artificiality. Memory is regarded as the spontaneous, natural act of remembrance by individuals and collective entities such as communities. Halbwachs, in fact, emphasized the socially and communally collective context of all memory, even individual memory. History, by contrast is characterized as artificial, even manipulative and associated with the powerful and the successful. The artificial, contrived nature of history is seen to lie in the methodological protocols which characterize its modern, professional practice. Following Halbwachs, Pierre Nora, and Yosef Yarushalmi, among others, have lamented the hegemony of history at the expense of collective memory. Nora actually portrayed history almost as a destructive and negative force that 'besieges memory deforming it...penetrating and petrifying it'.[28] The pre-modern narratives studied in this book cannot be characterized as invariably detached from the politics of power and to this extent they do not conform to definitions of memory in those terms. But, by the other criteria used by Nora, Yarushalmi et al., they might well fall under the rubric of memory since pre-modern narratives did not follow the methodological protocols of modern, disciplinary history.

However, the conceptualization of history and memory as so very sharply contrasted seems exaggerated. As Jacques Le Goff points out, memory is not necessarily innocent of the problematics of power and is equally subject to manipulation.[29] Rather than viewing history as a sinister antithesis to memory, I find Le Goff's suggestion of a complementarity

between the two to be much more persuasive. 'Memory', according to Le Goff, 'is the raw material of history. Whether mental, oral, or written, it is the living source from which historians draw...moreover the discipline of history nourishes memory'.[30] Finally, the common tendency to think of history in the modern form as focussed on the subject of the nation-state, I believe, needs to be modified as does the lament for the loss or marginalization of 'memory' or any practice of remembering the past which does not fit the model of modern, academic history. I offer a brief discussion of some of these issues in the last chapter of the book.

Political Culture and History: The Mughal Empire and Persianization

The historiographic narratives explored in this book were composed in Bengal under Mughal rule during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Mughal empire is the subject of a large body of scholarly literature. Most studies concentrate on and provide valuable insights into the administrative and military institutions associated with the government of the empire.[31] Investigating the perceived weakening and decline of the empire in the eighteenth century has also been a topic of abiding interest for scholars.[32] By contrast, there has been surprisingly little research on the cultural dimensions of the Mughal imperial polity.[33] This polity was indeed long-lived, admittedly in a much weakened condition from the eighteenth century onwards. However, the image of the Mughals as the paramount source of political authority and sovereignty within the Indian subcontinent lingered on long after it had lost most of its territories and had been reduced to dire financial straits. The continuing perception of the Mughals as legitimate political overlords through the eighteenth and, at least, part of the nineteenth centuries, indicates a need for scholarly explorations of the cultural phenomena and practices associated with the empire. In the absence of such studies, it is harder to understand the remarkably long-lived hegemony in the Gramscian sense, enjoyed conceptually at least by the Mughal polity. The 'hegemony' referred to here was admittedly symbolic and a matter of perception during the eighteenth century and later. But who would argue that symbols and perceptions are unimportant? Thus, a study of the cultural dimensions of the Mughal polity can provide invaluable insights into the ability of the empire to function not only as an efficient military/adminsitrative entity, but also in some sense, as a cultural exemplar.

Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam have emphasized the need for the development of this trajectory in studies of Mughal India.[34] Some scholarly strides in this direction have occurred since then; other scholarly steps had already been taken in this direction at the time of Alam and Subrahmanyam's reminder about the need for more work along these lines. J.F. Richards' study of the development among Mughal bureaucrats of a tradition of loyal, devoted service to the empire represents a landmark in the study of the political culture of this imperial polity.[35] Richard Eaton's exploration of the simultaneous expansion of the agrarian frontier, and the initial spread of Islam in eastern Bengal, during the period of Mughal rule indicates a significant break from the established paradigm of studying Mughal revenue-collection mechanisms.[36] Ruby Lal's recent monograph is a sophisticated study of the processes by which the Mughal haram emerged, both as a concept and as a spatial, institutional entity.[37] Also representative of research which is focused more directly on the cultural dimensions of the Mughal state are the researches of Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam on the significance of a Persianized culture both within Mughal India and beyond it.[38]

A feature which was closely associated with Mughal governance was the Persian language and associated with it, a Persanized political culture. Muzaffar Alam's study of the Mughal pursuit of Persian emphasizes the function of this language as a tool of administration, but perhaps, even more importantly, its ability to contribute to the creation of a political culture, 'arching over diverse Indian religious and cultural identities, Persian in the existing circumstances promised to be the appropriate vehicle to communicate and sustain such an ideal'.[39] Persian also served as a trans-regional, cosmopolitan language and associated culture which was followed not just by political elites within India during and prior to Mughal times, but also by their counterparts in a wider Islamic and Islamicate world. Deriving from its status as the language of high culture in large parts of the Islamic world, Persian had for long been used for the composition of histories. These narratives, called tarikhs, provided connected accounts of reigns of successive kings and their government. The authors and audiences of tarikhs were most often people who were closely connected with courtly society. In pre-Mughal as well as in Mughal times, the tarikh came to represent a pre-eminent type of historiographic narrative which was linked to the culture prevailing among courtly and political elites.[40]

This book studies the transmission of a Persianized, Mughal political culture among the aristocracy and gentry of Bengal. In particular it

seeks to trace the shadows cast by the Indo-Persian tarikh tradition on a variety of historiographic narratives that were produced here during that period. The Persian language and a Persianized political culture are understood to be important factors which linked together in particular the higher ranks of Mughal imperial officials in different parts of the empire. This study focuses in particular on how provincial aristocracy and gentry—many of whom had direct and indirect links with Mughal provincial government—appropriated aspects of this Persianized culture. One of the findings of this study is that although historiographic narratives current in Bengal during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were embedded within well-established literary forms and conventions (primarily Sanskritic and regional/vernacular), during this period, they exhibited siginificant shifts and changes in terms of content and idiom. Many of these 'newer' features, I argue, were inflected with elements drawn from a Persianized culture. The experience of Mughal rule, the necessity of understanding the subcontinental configuration of political power, and the perceived attractiveness of assimilating aspects of a Persianized political culture—these factors collectively explain the newer features manifest in certain types of historiographic texts current in the region. Persian tarikhs composed in eighteenth century Bengal also showed sensitivity to the immediate political and cultural contexts in which they were produced. The English language narratives composed by employees of the English East India Company were equally attuned during this period to a Persianized historiographical and cultural tradition. The ability of early modern historiographic texts to adjust to contingent political contexts and to mirror prevailing issues and anxieties, sometimes in new and different idioms and political vocabularies, is a powerful reminder that history writing in pre-modern and early-modern India was not necessarily an exercise in repeating formulaic, unchanging notions of the past. Instead, they functioned as political and cultural statements derived from their immediate environments.

The appropriation of a Persianized political culture by the elites of Mughal Bengal is related to an issue of considerable weight and significance, that is the reception of empire by its subjects, particularly in terms of its political culture. The issue is actually part of an even larger question regarding the cultural interactions and tensions between the imperial polity on the one hand and a range of regional, local, vernacular cultures in different parts of the empire on the other. Catherine Asher's description of what was effectively a double-sided movement between the two is more than valid.[41] Asher demonstrates how Bengal's vernacular

architectural style became an element in Mughal architecture following the conquest of the region in the later sixteenth century; Shantanu Phukan studies the reception of the Hindi/Awadhi romance, the *Padmavat* by Mughal readers;[42] Lizzie Collingham sketches out the processes by which the humble *khichri*, a staple of the peasant's diet, was integrated into the royal cuisine of the Mughals, albeit after it was made richer and more sophisticated.[43] Scholars of music demonstrate how regional musical traditions were admitted into an evolving tradition of Hindustani classical music.[44] The concern of the present study with the relationship between a Persianized Mughal culture and its resonance in the province of Bengal, is located within this broad topic. Although fully aware of its connection to this broader topic, in this book, I concentrate on a smaller, delimited aspect of it, that is, the appropriation by a segment of Bengal's society of aspects of a Mughal, Persianized political culture and its manifestation in historiographic narratives composed in this region during a selected period of time.

Existing historiography on the Mughals has not had much to say so far about how the empire and its culture were received and perceived by its subjects.[45] This is particularly true for Bengal where the received picture tends to portray it for the most part as an oppressive, 'foreign' regime which was seriously alienated from its subjects. Bengal itself is regarded as a distant, peripheral part of the Mughal polity. The prevalence of Persian among the Bengali gentry has long been acknowledged by older traditions of scholarship on this subject.[46] But this corpus of scholarship does not go far enough in assessing the extent and depth not just of the Persian language, but a Persianized political cultural phenomenon in this region. Persian is treated either as a new philological influence, or as a utilitarian medium for career advancement.[47] The status of Persian as a medium of sophistication, refinement, and cosmopolitanism among the Bengali gentry and aristocracy of this period tends to be overlooked. Also, the Mughal phase in Bengal's history has not generated much scholarly attention in the last several decades.[48] It is worthwhile, in the light of a newer wave of scholarship about Mughal India to explore the provincial manifestations of an imperial political culture.

Interactions between Islamicate and Indic Cultures

Persianization in the Mughal and pre-Mughal contexts also represented an element in a broader Islamicate culture that had enjoyed currency

in India for several centuries. The exploration of patterns of interaction among Bengali narrative genres and a Persianized tradition therefore indicates an effort to study the dynamics between Islamicate culture on the one hand and an Indic, vernacular, regional culture on the other, together with the manifest limitations of such an encounter. Scholars of South Asian Islam in recent years have shown a remarkable sensitivity towards the question of the interactions between Islamic cultural traditions and the many Indic, vernacular traditions in different parts of the subcontinent.[49] Regarding historiography though, the tendency has still been to study the Indo-Persian tarikh tradition separately from the many regional, Indic, vernacular literary and historiographical traditions. The narrative materials studied in this book support the position that a Persianized culture and perhaps, more specifically, the Indo-Persian tarikh literature, may well explain the emergence of certain newer features in the former. This does not imply that such a process involved the virtual transplantation of features associated with tarikhs into Bengal's genealogical traditions or other types of narratives during the early modern period. Instead, as the substantive chapters of the book demonstrate, this process was associated with a deliberate and selective assimilation of particular idioms and vocabularies primarily from a Persianized political culture.

The Book and its Plan

This work is based on Bengali, Sanskrit, Persian, and English materials. The main corpus of primary sources though are drawn from Bengali materials composed around the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Materials from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—local histories, family chronicles, and such others provide invaluable information and insights to reconstruct the environment in which Bengali aristocracy and gentry embraced a Persianized culture and allowed some of its features to be reflected in particular kinds of narrative and historiographic texts that they patronized, composed, and read. The issue regarding the type of sources used is significant—it speaks to the importance of writing Mughal history, based not on just Persian materials, but of combining these with materials in regional, vernacular languages. Persian sources must remain predominant for reconstructing many important aspects of Mughal history—administrative history certainly, but also cultural history. But to view the empire and its culture through the prism of vernacular literature

yields a picture which is different in many important respects. It allows us to track the imprints left by the empire and its political culture on regional traditions and cultures.

This study of early modern historiographical narratives produced and used in early modern Bengal does not pretend to be comprehensive. I have selected and studied materials that are indicative of certain genres and traditions that were used widely in this region for many centuries. This is true of the genealogies explored in Chapter 2 and the performance narratives, particularly its *Mangalkavya* genre studied in Chapter 3. Some other materials were in a sense unique to the exact time and context in which they were produced: the accounts studied in Chapters 4, 5, and 6 for instance, are illustrative of it. The texts discussed in Chapter 4 are Bengali narratives composed in circumstances that cannot be envisioned in the absence of a colonial state in Bengal during the later eighteenth century. However, they also need to be positioned vis-à-vis a longer tradition of 'accounts of kings' that transcend the immediate moment of their production. The narratives discussed in Chapter 5 are also 'accounts of kings'. These belong to a long tradition of Persian and Indo-Persian accounts regarding rulers and their modes of governance. The timing, substance, and the context of their composition were also unique to the situation produced in Bengal in the late eighteenth century by the decline of the Mughal polity and the concomittant rise of an English East India Company's state. The English language narratives studied in Chapter 6 were composed by officials of the English East India Company, impelled by the dilemmas generated by the sudden transition of the Company to the status of ruler during the later eighteenth century. Chapters 2 through 6 explore the content and function of these different types of narratives as well as their material contexts. An effort has also been made to tease out and examine what, if any, newer textual features are evident in these narratives—whether in terms of substance, idiom, or political imagination. Chapter 1 sketches out the political, cultural, and literary environment of Mughal and very early colonial Bengal. Chapter 7 discusses the phenomenon of Persianization both as an aspect of Mughal political culture within India as well as a broader trans-Indian, Islamicate cultural phenomenon. The extent of Persianization in Mughal Bengal, as well as its limits, are also addressed here. The last chapter serves both as a conclusion and as a place for afterthoughts—it engages too with the notion that the coming of colonialism and modernity to India erased older modes of commemorating the past and left the field clear for the dominance of objective, rational academic history written by specialists.

Finally, a brief note about the use of the term 'history' in this book. This book is centred around the writing of history in early modern India. However, as the discussion above has hopefully made clear, history in its seventeenth and eighteenth century senses was different from what it came to denote from the later nineteenth century onwards—particularly in terms of the specialized, professional definition of it. I use the term 'history' in this book primarily to denote narratives about the past. The particular context of its usage indicates whether I refer to it as an early modern practice or as a modern, professional practice of a rational-positivist character. Trying to avoid using the term 'history' for the early modern period would have meant a recourse to using phrases such as 'narratives of the past' all the time—a practice that seemed somewhat clumsy. In the same vein, I use the term historiography to indicate works of history. Here too, the specific context determines whether such usage refers to histories of the early modern Indian/Bengali type, or the rational-empirical, professional histories of the later nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Notes

1. *Kalhana's Rajatarangini*, M.A. Stein (ed. and tr.), Delhi, 1987, vol. 1, p. 2.

2. *Ain-i-Akbari of Abul Fazl Allami*, H.S. Jarrett (tr.), with further annotations by Sir J.N. Sarkar, Calcutta, 1949, vol. 2, p. 375.

3. See Chapter 4 for a discussion on this point.

4. Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, New York, 1988.

5. Similar critiques have been voiced earlier by Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Penumbral Visions: Making Polities in Early Modern South Asia*, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 255–6; Sheldon Pollock, 'Forms of Knowledge in Early Modern South Asia: Introduction', in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2004, pp. 19–21.

6. Representative works include, Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Symbols of Substance: Court and State in Nayaka Period Tamil Nadu*, New Delhi, 1992; Brajdulal Chattopadhyaya, *The Making of Early Medieval India*, New Delhi, 1994; Cynthia Talbot, *Pre-Colonial India in Practice: Society, Region and Identity in Medieval Andhra*, New Delhi, 2001; Ronald Inden, Jonathan Walters, Daud Ali, *Querying the Medieval: Texts and the History of Practices in South Asia*, New York, 2000; Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India*, Cambridge, 2004; Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in*

History: Reconstructions from South Asia, Berkeley, 2003; Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture and Power in Premodern India*, Berkeley, 2006, and others.

7. Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World History*, New York, 2002.

8. Bonnie G. Smith, *The Gender of History: Men, Women and Historical Practice*, Cambridge, Mass., 2000, p. 119; Georg G. Iggers and James M. Powell, *Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline*, Syracuse, N.Y., 1990; Donald R. Kelley, *Fortunes of History: Historical Inquiry from Herder to Huizinga*, New Haven, 2003; Julia Robin Solomon, *Objectivity in the Making: Francis Bacon and the Politics of Inquiry*, Baltimore, 1998.

9. See for example, James Mill, *History of British India with Notes by H.H. Wilson and Introduction by J.K. Galbraith*, New York, 1968, vol. 2, p. 107.

10. Qeyamuddin Ahmed (ed.), *India by Al-Biruni*, New Delhi, 1995, p. 193.

11. William Ward, *A View of the History, Literature and Mythology of the Hindoos*, part 1, New York/London, 1970 (rpt.), p. clxxiii; *Thomas Babington Macaulay, Selected Writings*, John Clive and Thomas Pinney (eds) and with an Introduction, Chicago, 1972, pp. 242–3.

12. See for example, Ramesh Chandra Majumdar and Kalyan Kumar Bandyopadhyaya, 'Introduction', *Bharate Itihasa Rachana Pranali*, Calcutta, 1979, no pp.

13. Bernard Lewis and P.M. Holt, *Historians of the Middle East*, London, 1962; David C. Gordon, *Self-Determination and History in the Third World*, Princeton, 1971; Margaret Mehl, *History and the State in Nineteenth Century Japan*, New York, 1998; Patricia Pelley, *Postcolonial Vietnam: New Histories of the National Past*, Durham, 2002.

14. Ranajit Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth Century Agenda and its Implications*, Calcutta, 1988; Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World History*, New York, 2002; Sudipta Kaviraj, 'The Imaginary Institution of India', in Partha Chatterjee and Gyanendra Pandey (eds), *Subaltern Studies VII: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 1–39; Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton, 1993, pp. 76–94, 95–115; Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, 2000, pp. 27–46, 97–113.

15. See for example R. Guha, *History at the Limit of World History*; P. Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, pp. 76–115.

16. Marshall Sahlins, *Apologies to Thucydides: Understanding History as Culture and Vice Versa,* Chicago, 2004, p. 2.

17. Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India 1600–1800,* New Delhi, 2001, pp. 1–23.

18. Cynthia Talbot, 'The Story of Prataprudra: Hindu Historiography', in David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (eds), *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia,* Gainesville, 2000, pp. 282–99; Rao-Shulman-Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*; Sumit Guha, 'Speaking Historically: The Changing Voices of Historical Narration in Western India, 1400–1900', *American Historical Review*, vol. 109, no. 4, October 2004, pp. 1084–1103; Prachi Deshpande, *Creative Pasts: Historical Memory and Identity in Western India, 1700–1960,* New York, 2007; Ramya Sreenivasan, *The Many Lives of a Rajput Queen: Heroic Pasts in India C. 1500–1900,* Seattle, 2007.

19. Rao-Shulman-Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*, pp. 1–23.

20. Romila Thapar, 'Society and Historical Consciousness: the Itihasa-Purana Tradition', in Romila Thapar and Sabyasachi Bhattacharya (eds), *Situating History: Essays in Honour of Sarvepalli Gopal,* New Delhi, 1986, pp. 353–83.

21. Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Western Europe*, Baltimore, 1993.

22. S. Guha, 'Speaking Historically'.

23. Rao-Shulman-Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time,* pp. 5, 6, 19, 253–55, 260.

24. S. Guha, 'Speaking Historically'.

25. Diane Owen Hughes, 'Introduction', in Diane Owen Hughes and Thomas R. Trautmann (eds), *Time, Histories and Ethnologies,* Ann Arbor, 1995, p. 1; Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object,* Cambridge, Mass., 1985.

26. Hayden White, 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality', in Hayden White, *The Content of the Form,* pp. 1–25.

27. Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, New York: Harper and Row, 1980; Idith Zertal, 'From the Peoples' Hall to the Wailing Wall: A Study of Memory, Fear and War', *Representations*, vol. 69, Winter 2000, pp. 96–126. The literature on history and memory is large and it is not possible to provide a comprehensive reference of all works. I cite below works to which I have directly referred in the text, or those I found particularly relevant.

28. Pierre Nora, 'Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Memoire', *Representations*, vol. 26, Spring 1989, pp. 7–25; Yosef Hayim Yarushalmi, *Zakhor: Jewish Memory and Jewish History*, Seattle, 1982, and others.

29. Jacques Le Goff, *History and Memory*, Steven Randall and Elizabeth Claman (tr.), New York, 1992; see also, Yasmin Saikia, *Fragmented Memories: Struggling to be Tai-Ahom in India*, Durham, 2004, pp. 14–15; Prachi Deshpande, *Creative Pasts*, pp. 3–4.

30. Le Goff, *History and Memory*, p. xi.

31. Some of the classics of this literature include, Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Mughal Administration*, Calcutta, 1920; Irfan Habib, *The Agrarian System of Mughal India (1556–1707)*, Bombay, 1963; Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb*, Bombay, 1966; N.A. Siddiqui, *Land Revenue Administration under the Mughals:1700–1750*, Bombay, 1970; S. Nurul Hasan, *Thoughts on Agrarian Relations in Mughal India*, New Delhi, 1973; Satish Chandra, *Parties and Politics at the Mughal Court 1707–1740*, New Delhi, 2002 (rpt).

32. Sir J.N. Sarkar, *Fall of the Mughal Empire*, 4 vols, Bombay, 1964–72 (rpt); M. Athar Ali, 'The Passing of Empire: the Mughal Case', *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 9, no. 3, 1975, pp. 385–96; Karen Leonard, ' The Great Firm Theory of the Decline of the Mughal Empire', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 21, no. 2, April 1979, pp. 161–7; C.A. Bayly, *Rulers, Townsmen and Bazars: North Indian Society in the Age of British Expansion, 1770–1870*, Cambridge, 1982; Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab 1707–1748*, New Delhi, 1986.

33. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Mughal State 1526–1750*, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 1–71.

34. Ibid.

35. J.F. Richards, 'The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jahangir', in Alam and Subrahmanyam (eds), *The Mughal State: 1526–1750*, pp. 126–67; 'Norms of Comportment among Imperial Mughal Officials', in Barbara Daly Metcalf (ed.), *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, Berkeley, 1984, pp. 255–89.

36. Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204–1760*, New Delhi, 1994.

37. Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World*, Cambridge, 2005.

38. Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India 1200–1800,* Chicago, 2004; 'The Culture and Politics of Persian in Precolonial Hindustan', in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions from South Asia*, pp. 131–98; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Iranians Abroad: Intra-Asian Elite Migration and Early Modern State Formation', *Journal of Asian Studies,* vol. 51, no. 2, 1992, pp. 340–62; and 'Persianization and "Mercantilism" in Bay of Bengal History, 1400–1700', in Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges*, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 45–79.

39. Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam,* p. 134.

40. Chapter 1 contains more discussion of the Indo-Persian tarikh genre.

41 Catherine B. Asher, 'The Architecture of Raja Man Singh: A Study of Sub-Imperial Patronage', in Barbara S. Miller (ed.), *The Powers of Art: Patronage in Indian Culture*, New Delhi, 1992, pp. 191–6.

42. Shantanu Phukan, 'Through A Persian Prism: Hindi and Padmavat in the Mughal Imagination', unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2000.

43. Lizzie Collingham, *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors*, New York, 2006, pp. 22, 25, 33.

44. Francoise 'Nalini' Delvoye, 'The Thematic Range of Dhrupad Songs Attributed to Tansen', in Alan W. Entwistle and Francoise Malleson (eds), *Studies in South Asian Devotional Literature: Research Papers, 1988–1991,* New Delhi, 1994, pp. 406–27; Madhu Trivedi, 'Hindustani Music and Dance: An Examination of Some Texts in the Indo-Persian Tradition', in Muzaffar Alam, Francoise 'Nalini' Delvoye and Marc Gaborieau (eds), *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture*, New Delhi, 2000, pp. 281–306.

45. Articles on rebellions by the lower orders against the Mughal regime, such as those studied by Gautam Bhadra, 'Two Frontier Uprisings in Mughal India', in Alam and Subrahmanyam (eds), *The Mughal State*, pp. 474–90, provide a sense of subaltern perceptions of the Mughal state. Richards, 'Norms of Comportment among Imperial Mughal Officials', pp. 255–89 and 'The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jehangir', pp. 126–67, provide insights into the perceptions of empire by mansabdars.

46. K.K. Datta, *Studies in the History of the Bengal Subah,* Calcutta, 1936; *Ali Vardi Khan and his Times,* Calcutta, 1939; Mohammed Enamul Huq, *Muslim Bengali Literature*, Karachi, 1957; Abdul Karim, *Murshid Quli Khan and his Times,* Dacca, 1963; Sir J.N. Sarkar, *History*

of Bengal, Muslim Period 1200–1757, Patna, 1973 (rpt); Sukumar Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa*, vols 1 and 2, 1405 BS, Calcutta, (rpt); Sukhamoy Mukhopadhyaya, *Banglar Itihaser Du'sho Bachar: Svadhin Sultander Amal*, Calcutta, 1980.

47. Such views are exemplified for example in Sarkar, *History of Bengal* and Suniti Kumar Chatterji, *Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*, Calcutta, 2002 (rpt).

48. Aniruddha Ray, *Adventurers, Landowners and Rebels: Bengal c. 1575–1715*, New Delhi, 1998 is an exception.

49. Richard M. Eaton, *Islam and the Bengal Frontier*, in Richard M. Eaton (ed.), *India's Islamic Traditions 711–1750*, New Delhi, 2003; and David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (eds), *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, Gainesville, 2000, are representative examples.

1

Mapping Early Modern Bengal
Polity, Culture, and the Literary Universe

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were politically eventful for Bengal. These centuries witnessed the consolidation of a Mughal provincial regime and, deriving from it, a Mughal successor state in the region. They also witnessed the demise of the latter and the emergence of the English East India Company as first the de facto, and then the sovereign ruler by the middle to later decades of the eighteenth century.

The Mughal state in Bengal (including its lineal descendant, the Nawabi state which, except for a short phase from 1760–4, had been rendered ineffective for all practical purposes since 1757) replaced a series of Muslim dynasties (Turkish, Afghan, and others) that had ruled there since the thirteenth century.[1] The pre-Mughal Bengal sultanate introduced into this region certain cultural traditions and practices—including the Persian language—which later came to be associated more strongly with a Mughal imperial ethos. With the formal incorporation of Bengal into the Mughal empire in the later sixteenth century, Mughal cultural influences joined the many indigenous cultural traditions current in this area. The mid-eighteenth century revolution, which enshrined the English East India Company as the ruler of Bengal, also essentially represented the culmination of a long process in the expansion of the Company's political power and economic clout in Bengal. Each of these successive states was associated with certain cultural and intellectual traditions, which did not however terminate neatly with the eclipse of the political regimes with which they were implicated.[2] Thus, in eighteenth century Bengal, multiple intellectual and literary traditions were prevalent.

The first section in this chapter discusses the history and nature of the polity in Bengal in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Section two reconstructs the main features of the social and cultural configuration of medieval and early modern Bengal. Since different historiographic traditions were intimately connected with stylistic and other conventions associated with different literary cultures, it is imperative to establish a clear picture of the literary-linguistic map of early modern Bengal as a necessary prelude to discussing distinct styles and genres of narratives that have a historiographical content. The third and final section is thus devoted to an exploration of the principal literary cultures of early modern Bengal. In the literary traditions current in Bengal, certain terms were particularly associated with the writing of history. These terms were itihasa/Purana, related to the Sanskritic-Bengali literary tradition, and tarikh, related to the Indo-Persian or Indo-Islamic tradition. The final section also includes a discussion of the intellectual genealogies of these terms and the substantive concepts associated with them.

The Bengal Polity

In March 1575, the Mughal army defeated Daud Khan Kararni, the Afghan ruler of Bengal, in the Battle of Tukaroi. This victory marked Bengal's formal incorporation into the Mughal empire. However, Mughal control over Bengal in the 1570s was tenuous and uneven at best, and it took decades of campaigning by the imperial forces in Bengal as well as in adjoining Bihar and Orissa to secure any kind of effective authority over the newly acquired province.[3]

Under the sultanate state which preceded the Mughal regime in Bengal, certain areas had been under the control of local chieftains known as *bhuiyans* or rajas, who enjoyed considerable autonomy over their estates.[4] The turbulent times intervening between the Afghan phase of the Bengal sultanate and the onset of Mughal rule provided existing territorial barons as well as aspiring ones with even more opportunities for local aggrandizement. This presaged a phenomenon that was to plague the Mughals in Bengal for decades—the presence of a range of largely autonomous landed magnates who were reluctant to forfeit the local latitude they had come to enjoy for a more centralized form of administration. Consequently, the Mughals were confronted with insurgencies led by local barons in different parts of Bengal. Notable among them were Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore and Musa Khan

of Bhati. Musa Khan, in particular, was associated with a group of chieftains who had joined in common resistance to Mughal power and were collectively known as the *barabhuiyan*s (the twelve bhuiyans) of eastern Bengal.

The Mughal position in Bengal began to improve substantially from the early seventeenth century onward, owing primarily to a three-pronged policy that was implemented fairly effectively. This policy involved, first, playing off local chieftains against each other with promises of imperial favour and, second, showing a degree of clemency to former rebels. The combined result was that many of the local barons who had been opposed to the Mughals now rendered valuable services to it. The third prong of this policy was associated with the efforts of the Mughal army to subdue still-rebellious local barons in eastern Bengal. The early seventeenth century also saw the submission of many frontier chiefs who ruled principalities such as Bishnupur, Pachet, and Hijli, and the expansion of imperial power into the northeast, upto Kamrup and Assam.

The dawn of more settled conditions was complemented by the development of the institutions of Mughal provincial government. According to some historians, the Mughal state in Bengal, even in the post-sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was perennially 'under administered' and the territorial aristocracy continued to enjoy considerable latitude in local level affairs.[5] It is undeniable, though, that the implantation of these institutions in the region helped, in the long run, to normalize Mughal presence among ordinary people, and inaugurated the development and transmission of an imperial political culture. However, Mughal rule in Bengal underwent an important modification in the late seventeenth century at the hands of Murshid Quli Khan, who held the office of diwan of the province.

Murshid Quli Khan (1700–27) inaugurated the birth of a state encompassing Bengal, Bihar, and Orissa, which, though lineally connected to the Mughal imperial state was yet a virtually autonomous one. This polity preserved Mughal governmental institutions, enshrined Mughal political ideology as its guiding principle, and sought to derive legitimacy as a fragment of the empire.[6] Philip Calkins first drew attention to a nexus of alliances that the nawabs had successfully maintained with pre-eminent segments of Bengal's society: the military aristocracy, landholders and bankers, and wealthy merchants.[7] While the Calkins thesis is largely accurate in identifying certain important socio-political sources of support for the government of the nawabs,

I contend that the nexus of alliances was actually broader than that posited by Calkins. This point has been elaborated upon in Chapter 3. The pre-Plassey conspiracy, which literally opened the doors for the decline of the Murshidabad *niabat*, indicated the breakdown of the alliances that the Murshidabad rulers had maintained more or less successfully until now.[8] With the exception of the crisis generated by the pre-Plassey conspiracy, by far the most serious problem faced by this successor state was a series of recurrent attacks on Bengal launched by the Maratha Bargis from Nagpur between 1742 and 1751.[9] These invasions were related to the complexities created in the subcontinent by the weakening of Mughal central authority and the rise and expansion of regional polities in various regions of it. The repeated raids by the Bargis caused immense destruction and havoc in Bengal and untold miseries to people, especially in the western parts of the region.

Much of the energies of the Murshidabad nawabs were expended in creating a viable state with a strong financial base, in maintaining a delicate balance between being autonomous and yet simultaneously being subject to Mughal paramountcy and of coping with an increasingly aggressive and powerful English Company within its dominions. But, the nawabs of Murshidabad also appear to have been aware of the need to create an appropriate cultural environment for their kingdom, derived primarily from Mughal political culture. This culture, with its Islamicate character, was also strongly coloured by a Persianized ethos. The nawabs of Murshidabad welcomed and honoured Muslim holy men and scholars, made visits to tombs of *pir*s, and showed an appreciation for Persian poets and writers, and the patronage of artists by them stimulated the development of the Murshidabad *kalam*, or a Murshidabad-based style of painting during the eighteenth century.[10]

The story of seventeenth and especially eighteenth century Bengal remains incomplete without the discussion of an almost parallel process, also initiated many centuries ago, which culminated in the emergence of the English East India Company's state in 1772. The English East India Company joined various other groups of European traders who established themselves commercially in Bengal during the course of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. By the early eighteenth century, the English Company had an expanding and well-established trade in Bengal. The most important gains for the English Company in Bengal, both commercially and politically, were associated with the acquisition of a territorial enclave at Calcutta (1690s) and also with the vitally important political concession secured from the Mughal

emperor Farrukhsiyar in 1717. The ability to create a territorial base at Calcutta, in the long run, turned out to be a very big advantage for the Company.[11] In other words, even while the *subah* of Bengal was gradually making the implicit transition to the somewhat anomalous position of being an autonomous polity that had never severed its link to the Mughal empire, the nucleus of the English East India Company state was already forming within it.

Of the various issues demanding the attention of the Company's state in Bengal, one of the most pressing and pertinent issue related to revenue realization was the issue of the treatment of the landed aristocracy of Bengal. The rajas and zamindars of this region are particularly relevant to this book since many types of historiographic narratives studied in Chapters 2–6 were associated with them. Thus, it is necessary for us to take a look at the Bengal zamindars, not just as anti-Mughal rebels or as reluctant revenue payers, but in terms of their cultural functions as well.

Rajas, Zamindars, and the Experience of Mughal Rule

The Mughal operations aimed against rebellious magnates created a scenario in which some ancient principalities—such as Bishnupur and Birbhum—survived by submitting to the Mughals and were allowed considerable internal autonomy. Rebel chieftains were destroyed, but many new zamindaris were created with the blessings of the Mughals. The beneficiaries of these new zamindari grants usually acquired further rights, more responsible offices, and expanded the territories under their jurisdiction considerably. The role of the Mughals in creating and destroying zamindaris has been studied extensively by scholars such as Ratnalekha Ray, Shireen Akhtar, J.R. McLane, and others and hence does not merit repetition here.[12] Chapters 2 and 3 contain many specific examples of zamindaris created by the Mughals in Bengal as a way of rewarding those who aided their civil and military endeavours in the region.

The shake up of the zamindari system of Bengal continued into the next century. Murshid Quli Khan's revenue innovations aimed at enhancing the subah's revenue income in Bengal are well known. The effects of these on local magnates were significant. It meant, first, having to encounter a much stricter and tougher policy of revenue collection, accompanied often by direct personal torture and humiliation for the defaulting raja. Secondly, the regional zamindari structure was considerably affected. Murshid Quli Khan is supposed to have favoured

the growth of a few, especially large zamindaris (Burdwan and Rajshahi for instance), and dealt severely with others. He also encouraged the emergence of zamindaris under trusted officials. He and his successors, particularly Ali Vardi Khan, retained most features of his revenue policy. But, in the interest of making alliances with selected segments of the population, the Bengal nawabs, following Murshid Quli Khan, made their own *jagir* grants to favoured individuals all over their kingdom.[13]

The Permanent Settlement introduced by the East India Company's government in 1793 represented yet another turning point for Bengal's zamindars. This legislation converted a class of Mughal revenue collectors into absolute proprietors of land with (initially at least) unfettered powers to deal with their tenant cultivators in any way they pleased. This measure reduced peasant cultivators to the status of tenants without any customary rights to the lands they cultivated. This significant expansion in zamindari power was offset by a sharp increase in the amount of revenue payable by them to the Company's government; failure to discharge this obligation timely and in full meant the confiscation and auction of either entire zamindari estates or parts thereof. The results of the Permanent Settlement have been the topic of lively debate among historians for decades.[14] For our purposes, we need to note that the first few decades of the Permanent Settlement caused considerable hardship for many Bengal zamindars. Inability to meet the extremely high demands imposed by the early colonial state resulted in the loss and/or sale of many zamindari estates even during the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries.[15] However, the literary and historiographic traditions espoused by them continued for the most part to be shaped by the traditions that had shaped the environment in which these aristocrats and their courtiers and dependents had lived over the last several centuries.

The role of zamindars in Mughal and nawabi Bengal are supposed to have related more to the polity than the economy.[16] However, the works referred to for this study contain strong testimonies to the functions of rajas and zamindars in forest clearance, agricultural expansion, creation of settlements, and rural markets—both in eastern and western Bengal—through the sixteenth, seventeenth, and at least, the pre-colonial part of the eighteenth century. There are resonances of this in popular Bengali literature of the same period as well as in biographies of landed aristocrats.[17] Of greater relevance here is the role of zamindars in creating centres of scholarship, culture, and urbanity on their estates. This was important, for urbanity was also associated with

prosperity and civility and with the presence of people who were more refined, cultured, and sophisticated than ordinary peasant-*prajas*.

In the seventeenth century, Srihari and Janakiballabh (titled rajas Bikramaditya and Basanta Roy), respectively the father and uncle of Raja Pratapaditya, had undertaken the clearing of forests, as well as the building of roads and bridges to establish a territorial base for their family at Jessore. These rajas sent emissaries to places as far afield as Dhaka and Halishahar to encourage people from high caste and high jati backgrounds such as Brahmans and Kayasthas (especially Bangaja Kayasthas to which Raja Pratapaditya's family belonged) to settle in their territories. The families which responded to this invitation came to form a circle of distinguished literati around the raja of Jessore, who in turn supported them materially, often through grants of rent-free land. The presence of this community made it possible for the raja to establish schools of different kinds (*pathshalas*, *choubaris*), within his estate; the literati whom he had imported served as teachers.[18] In the eighteenth century, Raja Krishnachandra Roy of Nadia was celebrated for his initiatives in this regard. Many places, renowned as centres of intellectual activity in eighteenth century Bengal, such as Burdwan, Navadvipa, Halishahar, Shantipur, Tribeni, Bikrampur, and Faridpur were situated within and sometimes in the proximity of zamindars' residences.[19]

Scholarly assessments of Bengal's experience with Mughal rule are not uniform. However, Sir J.N. Sarkar was probably one of the very few to offer almost a eulogy about its positive effects. Sarkar believed that from the time of Jehangir, Bengal enjoyed relative peace internally—almost a 'pax Mughalia'. Also, Mughal encouragement to European traders opened the doors to unsurpassed economic prosperity for Bengal. Integration within the Mughal empire ended what Sarkar terms Bengal's 'isolation', both economically and culturally, and, in fact, fostered a 'cultural renaissance'.[20] Other scholars have been much less positive about the blessings brought to Bengal via the Mughal connection. Most evaluations of Mughal administration of this region focus on two issues: the intrepid anti-Mughal stance of Bengal's zamindars, who were adamantly opposed to the prospect of losing their regional autonomy to a distant power, and secondly, the exploitative and alien character of this regime. Tapan Raychaudhuri described Mughal rule in Bengal as akin to a 'foreign conquest'; he also emphasized the economic and financial exploitation of Bengal by the empire.[21] The image of Bengali zamindars as representatives of some kind of regional patriotism

developed during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a function of the compulsions of modern anti-colonial nationalism which looked to the past to find inspiring examples of native heroes who would not bow their heads to 'foreign' rulers. 'Popular' or romantic history in Bengal, particularly from this period, effectively enshrined the image of the Barabhuiyans and Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore as undefeated crusaders.[22] The Mughals also resorted to physical torture and coercion of zamindars who rebelled or were unable (or unwilling) to pay the stipulated sum of revenue. Even Sarkar—the unvarnished eulogist of Mughal governance over Bengal—admits that the benefits that allegedly accrued to Bengal due to Mughal rule were less the result of deliberate imperial policy and more a by-product of 'conquest and the administration which they imposed on the conquered land made the triumph of the new forces possible and easy'.[23]

Such representations of Mughal presence in Bengal have by and large produced either a near-total silence or an inadequate acknowledgement of the cultural dimensions of the imperial connection with this region. Commentaries on Bengal's own cultural life during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are not particularly positive either. Its literary life, particularly, was perceived as either having no connection with the Mughal presence, or as being influenced in a negative way by the Mughal/Muslim presence. Literary historians and other scholars generally portray the bulk of literary productions of this period as imitative, formulaic and lacking the vigour, quality and freshness of earlier centuries.[24] These remarks were meant mainly for the large volume of *Mangalkavyas* and other types of *panchali* literature that continued to be composed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and beyond. Tapan Raychaudhuri refers to the abundance of this literature as 'a sickening fertility...[which had] little striking to offer.'[25] Dinesh Chandra Sen decried the growing popularity of love stories, especially erotic literature such as the *Bidyasundar,* in this period. He saw in it signs of a growing literary taste that was inclined towards degeneracy and sensuality, and suggested that the opulent, ostentatious luxury of the royal courts may have been responsible for this decline in Bengali literary and cultural tastes and sensibilities during this period.[26] Implicit in such criticism is the suggestion that it was Muslim (rather than specifically Mughal) courtly life and its depraved cultural mores which had corrupted Bengali literary culture of the later seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries.[27]

There is also a tendency in literary scholarship to sometimes see the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as a sort of dark prelude to

the dawn of a new, modern sensibility, thanks to the presence of a colonial regime.[28] Given such representations of Mughal rule as well as Bengal's cultural poverty (which was partly the result of Mughal indifference and lack of interest in regional vernacular culture) in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Mughal political culture and its interaction with various types of cultural traditions current in Bengal have received little to no attention. This book attempts to redress this picture by exploring the currency of a Persianized Mughal culture among specific segments of Bengal's population and its embodiment in narratives with a historiographic content. It is necessary to try to modify the picture of total alienation and enmity between Bengal's territorial magnates and the Mughal regime as well. The *Baharistan-i-Ghaibi* describes in graphic detail the violence and terror almost deliberately perpetrated on Bengal as a way of impressing upon the people the might of the Mughal empire and intimidating them into compliance.[29] There is other evidence as well to support a view of the Mughal regime in Bengal as cruel, brutal and violent. During one of the many campaigns undertaken against the Jessore zamindari of Raja Pratapaditya, Murad, the brother of Mirza Nathan, brought back as captives four thousand women who had been stripped of their clothes.[30] The ballads of eastern Bengal record the common practice of officials seizing the women of peasant families.[31] A Sanskrit genealogy of the rajas of Nadia, entitled the *Kshitishvamsavalicharitam*, documents the sufferings of several of these rajas at the hands of the Mughal *subahdar*s.[32] The atrocities to which the Bengal zamindars were subjected by the nawabs of Murshidabad exceeded these punishments.[33] It is thus not difficult to see how the image of the Mughal regime as one that was extremely cruel and alienated from Bengal's zamindars had come to be constructed.

The dimension that is usually overlooked is that while many Bengal zamindars were rebels against the Mughals, many others accepted Mughal authority from the outset and reaped handsome benefits for doing so. The latter also became valuable allies in the Mughal campaigns both within Bengal and in the Mughal military drive towards the northeast. The clemency shown to defeated zamindars during the early seventeenth century also helped to win many of them over to the Mughal cause.[34] Even in the case of the best-known of the anti-Mughal rebels, such as Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore, it is hard to detect a story of uniform opposition to imperial authority. As the *Baharistan* shows, there were ceremonial gift exchanges between Raja Pratapaditya

and the Mughal subahdar Islam Khan. Apparently, both Pratapaditya and his son Sangramaditya were interested in being inducted into the Mughal imperial service.[35] Pratapaditya's entente with the Mughals was short-lived; nevertheless, it is important to note that, even for him, the relationship with imperial authority was not one of uniform opposition. The *Baharistan* also provides significant testimony to the fact that there were Mughal subahdars who were strongly opposed to the humiliation of rebel zamindars.[36]

The most convincing evidence perhaps of the positive relationship among many Bengal zamindars and the Mughal state in this region comes from traditions preserved within these zamindari families by poets and genealogists who were the protégées of these zamindars. These relationships were often not uniformly cordial over the centuries. But the territorial aristocracy valued their relationship with the Mughals, the paramount political authority in seventeenth and eighteenth century India, and commemorated it with pride in their familial genealogies and eulogic literature produced at their courts.[37] Family accounts of the rajas of Shushang, Pakur, as well as Lakshmikanta Majumdar, who became zamindar of a large area which included the villages of Sutanuti, Gobindapur, and Kalikata, emphasize their indebtedness to Raja Man Singh for the acquisition of their estates. These accounts also record how some of the rajas in question were escorted up to Delhi by Man Singh to be rewarded and feted by the Mughal emperor.[38] It is difficult to test the 'factuality' of these claims. If true, then Raja Man Singh seems to have literally led a procession of rajas from Bengal up to Delhi. What is of greater significance is the fact that family chronicles of these rajas chose to represent their relationship with their Mughal overlords in such terms. Yet, the romantic reconstructions of many medieval and early modern Bengal zamindars during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as anti-Mughal (sometimes, anti-Muslim) warriors succeeded in erasing from popular history as well as, to some extent, from professional historiography, this aspect of Bengal's relationship to the Mughal imperial formation.

Vernacular literature is also a valuable resource for tracing at least the broad outlines of popular perception regarding Mughal rule in Bengal, not just among the territorial aristocracy, but also among more ordinary people. The Mughals were certainly a distant presence for most ordinary people in Bengal during the period of time studied here. However, by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Mughal administrative units and the terminology associated with it—*sarkar*, *pargana*, *jagir*,

and others—had become part of the vocabulary used by fairly ordinary people to identify themselves in terms of a spatial and political hierarchy. In the *Chandikabijoy* of Dwija Kamalalochana, composed in the late seventeenth century, the poet described his place of residence as 'the jagir of the son of the lord of Delhi'.[39] Krishnaram Das, author of the *Kalikamangal*, also written in the late seventeenth century, indicated his personal location in terms of the Mughal political/administrative hierarchy. This began at the top with the emperor Aurangzeb and then passed through Shaista Khan, subahdar of Bengal, the Sabarna Chowdhurys, zamindars of the immediate area where the poet lived, and then on to the family of Krishnaram Das who were ordinary householders in a village near Calcutta.[40]

As distant overlords, the Mughal emperors were often perceived by village level poets, and presumably their audiences, to be standing above and apart from instances of oppression and coercion exerted by more immediate levels of political authority. However, the Mughals were invoked as distant, but revered overlords and often endowed with divine attributes. In his *Mangalchandir Geet* composed probably in the 1640s, Madhabacharya referred to Akbar as 'Ekbar badshah, Arjuna avatara'.[41] The poet Krishnaram Das compared Emperor Aurangzeb to 'Ram raja', the ideal king of India's epic tradition.[42] The poet Jadabram Nath or Jadunath referred to the divinities Buddha and Kalki merging together and ruling from the throne of Delhi as a *yavana* (Muslim) *padshah* in his *Dharmamangal*.[43] The more important point, however, is that ordinary Bengalis, in terms of prosaic administrative reality, as well as in terms of imagination, had come to accept and normalize Mughal rule as a part of their lives. This picture is substantially different from the received impression of the Mughals as an alien, 'foreign' regime, interested only in exploitation and oppression and unconnected in any other ways from the mainstream life of the region.

The tendency to associate the Mughals with divinity or incarnations of divinity also leads one to consider the significance and relevance of a Mughal imperial cult which had developed among the service-elites and regional aristocrats of the empire. Originating in the reign of Akbar and gaining strength through the reigns of successive Mughal padshahs, there had crystallized, particularly among *mansabdars* as well as among middle level officials, an ideology of dedicated service to the empire. In time, this ideology spread among other groups as well and, by the seventeenth century, even artists were referring to themselves as servants of the empire.[44] The most important components of this ideology

involved a sense of honour in serving the empire and the emperor, and also a strong sense of attachment to the person of the emperor which may have transcended mere loyalty to a political superior. Instead one finds a spirit of what Richards describes as 'imperial discipleship', imbued also with a kind of mystical reverence, resembling almost the adoration of a deity.[45] This imperial cult drew sustenance from a range of rituals and practices which cumulatively sustained this imperial cult in various corners of the empire. As Mirza Nathan's account indicates, officers of the Mughal army who were stationed in Bengal practised such rituals, as did Bengal's rajas and zamindars. Portraits of emperors and representations of the Timurid genealogical tree were revered by imperial officials and sometimes displayed on their persons (placed in turbans, for example) as obvious symbols of their personal devotion to the imperial family.[46] The same spirit of reverential adoration was manifest in public rituals enacted by mansabdars on the receipt of written orders from the emperor.[47]

The Cultural Environment

Certain overarching religious and cultural traditions shaped Bengal's life during the early modern period. According to Kunal Chakrabarty, by the early medieval period, Brahminism had emerged in Bengal as the predominant religious and cultural tradition. Challenges to Brahminism were indeed well known both within Bengal and beyond, and the formal articulation of Brahminical ideology may not have been well understood by large sections of ordinary people. But, as Chakrabarty points out, the deference paid to it over the ages shows its extraordinary dominance as ideology.[48] It is necessary to keep in mind that even in the early medieval period, Brahminism cannot be regarded as a homogeneous social and religious tradition. Clustered within Brahminism were a variety of sects such as the Shaivas, Shaktas, and Vaishnavas, and many others. What bound them together was a common respect for the infallibility of the Vedas and acknowledgement of them as 'notional authority' and the acceptance of a social order based on varnashrama principles. In addition, Brahminism's position as the dominant cultural tradition of Bengal had been attained through a protracted and intense struggle with the forces of Tantra and Buddhism that were deemed to be both external and inimical to it.[49]

Bengal's Brahmanism also had to deal with the challenge of non-Brahminical folk religious beliefs and practices, which are not easily

subsumed under terms such as 'Tantra' or 'Buddhism'. But, it is useful to keep in mind that the boundaries between Buddhism, Tantra, or even Brahminism for that matter, and the so-called folk religious cultures were permeable and porous.[50] The advent of Islam in Bengal may have served as a wake-up call to Brahminism to reach out and initiate strategies of accommodation with a range of religious practices and ideas prevalent among people, described as the *antyaja* ('subaltern,' marginal) population of the less Brahminized parts of Bengal. The religious cultures current among the antyaja people revolved around the worship of deities such as Dharma Thakur, Manasa the snake goddess, Chandi (that is, prior to her undergoing a process of Brahminization and emerging as the consort of Shiva), and others. The motivations of Brahminism in initiating strategies of compromise with these traditions included a concern to preserve and strengthen the social base of Brahminism and also the concern of non-elite rural Brahmin priests to secure a steady clientele among the antyaja people of forested regions, for example. As Kunal Chakrabarty, Jawhar Sircar, and others have pointed out, the phenomenon described here found expression in the emergence of the vernacular *Mangalkavya* tradition which embodied the 'overt and covert persuasion of the Brahmanical composers...to win over the antyaja-caste mass base of Dharma and other popular cults'.[51] Bengali Vaishnavism also reflected the need to establish connections with those segments of the population that were either positioned on the fringes of Brahminical society or deemed to be outside it.

Islam's advent in this region is most commonly associated with a conquering military force represented by the armies of Turkish military adventurers like Bakhtiyar Khilji. The overall depiction of Islam, especially in its political manifestation, is that of a series of alien, violent, and oppressive regimes which adhered to a religious culture that stood completely apart from other religious cultures current in the region. Yet, the sympathy and interest in Bengali vernacular culture exhibited by the sultans of Bengal, particularly since the mid-fifteenth century, has earned them a more positive depiction. As noted above, it is the Mughals whose representation is a little more negative, since in their case the perceived absence of any interest in regional vernacular culture compounded their image as 'foreign' and—thanks to the popular myth of the barabhuiyans—also cruel and violent.

Overall, however, there is a tendency to assume that Muslim political regimes (the distinctions among the sultans, the Mughals, and the

Murshidabad nawabs are sometimes blurred, particularly by literary historians) had an interest, perhaps even an agenda, in destroying Hindu temples, oppressing Hindus (the most common form was perceived to be through destroying the varna/jati status of Hindus by deliberately 'polluting' them; some aspects of such allegations have been discussed in Chapter 2), as well as proselytizing. Such charges have sometimes been made without any specific examples to support them.[52] Individual cases of over-zealous officials committing such acts are not unknown. But it is not feasible to support a blanket assertion that the Bengal sultans, the Mughals, and the Murshidabad nawabs adopted deliberate and coherent policies of converting Hindu subjects and destroying Hindu temples.

Detached from its connection to political power, the presence and activities of Sufi communities in Bengal have merited a fair amount of scholarly attention—particularly, the interaction between Sufi sects on the one hand and varieties of indigenous spiritual mysticism on the other.[53] In Bengal, Islam's greatest 'success' occurred in the eastern part of the region, where in time there emerged a predominantly Muslim population. Eaton's beautifully sophisticated study of this phenomenon unites a nuanced, historicized understanding of religious, political, and agrarian processes underlying it. In eastern Bengal, 'Islam was introduced as a civilization-building ideology associated both with settling and populating the land and with constituting a transcendent reality consonant with that process.'[54] Yet, as Eaton, Stewart, and others rightly remind us, it would be inaccurate to think that the Islamization of eastern Bengal produced an instantaneous change in religious/cosmological beliefs. Islamic institutions during this period proved sufficiently flexible to accommodate the non-Brahminized religious culture of medieval and early modern Bengal. On the other hand, religious traditions already present in eastern Bengal accommodated the amalgam of rituals, rites, and beliefs associated with village mosques and shrines then proliferating in their midst.[55]

The cultural environment shaped formal systems of education prevalent in early modern Bengal. There were separate systems of 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' education, but also a sphere of education associated with career opportunities which both the Hindu and Muslim upper classes embraced equally during the period studied here. This type of education was associated with acquiring literacy—in some cases, high degrees of proficiency—in the Persian language. Local elites provided financial and other types of infrastructural support, including grants

of land, for the creation of schools.[56] Even into the early decades of the nineteenth century, schools where Persian was taught drew students from both Hindu and Muslim families. Some of the most common pedagogical materials used in these schools included Saadi's *Pandnama*, as well as the *Gulistan* and *Bustan* by the same author.[57] The curriculum of study heavily emphasized the study of the arts of correspondence, and epistolary models included the correspondence of Abul Fazl, the *Ruqaat-i-Alamgiri* consisting of the correspondence of the emperor Aurangzeb, as well as other *insha* collections.[58]

Most narratives texts referred to in this book were composed in the pre-print, manuscript era. Studies of the culture of manuscripts or, for that matter, studies of early print culture remain relatively neglected for South Asia.[59] A rich literature on this subject for European societies, for instance, reminds us of the valuable insights on cultural and intellectual history that can be gained through substantive studies of both manuscript and early print cultures.[60] What we do know about the world of books for the early modern era suggests that book ownership and the culture of reading and listening encompassed a much wider cross-section of society than one would initially suppose.[61] Thus, the enjoyment of at least certain kinds of literature was distributed among a wider segment of society and was not restricted to affluent families and the aristocracy. The vast majority of Bengali literary texts produced in the period prior to AD 1800, were verse narratives which were primarily intended for recitation and singing rather than for silent reading. The practice of texts being orally disseminated was widespread and cut across social distinctions. Panchali-type literature and genealogical literature were performed in venues associated with the uppermost classes of society;[62] the households of the nawabs of Murshidabad included storytellers who regaled the royal family with stories.[63] This practice was equally common among more ordinary families. Poor and working-class people also engaged in similar reading, listening, and singing practices as far as performance-narratives were concerned.[64] Women figured importantly, as audiences, and sometimes as readers and performers, of such domestic reading, recitation, and singing sessions.[65]

The performative nature of many varieties of narratives discussed in this book helps us to see clearly that most of these texts possessed a popular community-oriented character. I use the term 'popular' here not to denote a cultural sphere which was completely bounded and separated from that of more elite, sophisticated culture, but rather to indicate a domain that was associated with the vast majority of ordinary people and

yet did not maintain a totally separate and distinct existence from the latter. Many of the narrative types studied here did not belong exclusively to the sphere of formal education and intellectual endeavours.[66] These types of texts were read at home, beyond the confines of educational institutions. This point reinforces the view of Rao-Shulman-Subrahmanyam that 'history' in pre-modern/early modern India was not regarded as a formal shastra or intellectual discipline. It is true that the authors of genealogies, the Bengali Ramayanas and Mahabharatas, and panchalis of various kinds were usually people who had received some formal education. For them, Sanskritic-Brahmanical education comprised a sort of intellectual reservoir from which they could, at times, draw upon to elucidate and embellish the stories they told. The Persian tarikhs studied in Chapter 5 possessed a long tradition of being associated with genteel, educated and, particularly, courtly society. Tarikh texts may not have been commonly studied formally at Persian schools, but they were not completely unknown either. William Adam referred to the use in some schools of materials such as the *Shahnameh* of Firdausi.[67]

Historiographic narrative texts were anchored within certain linguistic-literary traditions. The following section discusses the principal literary cultures current in seventeenth and eighteenth century Bengal. It also explores the concepts of history associated with these cultures and the terminologies used to denote them.

The Literary Universe

The Bengali Literary Tradition

The Bengali language, during the early and later medieval periods, as well as the early modern age, was used primarily as the medium of everyday speech, to some extent for letter-writing, and composition of works with a religious dimension. The prose form of Bengali was used for quotidian and documentary purposes; creative Bengali literature, until the very end of the eighteenth century, was almost always in verse.[68] Circumstances related to the beginnings of a Bengali prose literature are discussed in Chapter 4. The popular nature of this vernacular ensured that literary works composed with the aim of maximum diffusion and transmission would be cast in this language. A large number of Bengali literary creations during the twelfth to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were derived from the Sanskritic literary tradition, and the latter were frequently used as templates for

vernacular expression. Yet, despite the obvious and deliberate effort to forge links with Puranic, epic, and other Sanskritic traditions, it would be incorrect to regard this corpus as merely imitative or derivative. They reflected regional sensibilities and experiences and can be seen at best as vernacular articulations of a pan-Indian Sanskritic tradition.[69] A major branch of Bengali literature prior to the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was comprised of literature that grew up around the charismatic figure of Sri Chaitanya and the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement he initiated in the early sixteenth century.[70] This large corpus of Vaishnava literature is regarded as a significant development in Bengali literature.[71] Narratives such as Brindaban Das's *Chaitanyabhagabat* and the *Chaitanyacharitamrita* of Krishnadas Kaviraj occupy places of special eminence within it. Bengali Vaishnavism is also associated with Vaishnava *padavali*s, that is, poems and songs celebrating the *lila* of Krishna and Radha, as well as other Vaishnava themes.[72] A rich tradition of what scholars of Bengali literature have described (not unproblematically though) as 'Bengali Muslim literature' also existed since the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The subject matter and themes of many of these works derived inspiration from the lives of the Prophet Muhammad, various Muslim pirs and holy men, and even love stories about various mortals that travelled from the Islamic heartlands in the Middle East to India.[73]

Yet, it is critically important not to lose sight of the fact that the evolving Bengali literary tradition during the early and late medieval periods functioned in a milieu in which first Sanskrit, and later Sanskrit and Persian, were present as trans-regional, cosmopolitan linguistic and cultural registers. Most histories of Bengali literature provide token acknowledgement of the presence and influence of Sanskrit; Persian and Hindustani influences receive very marginal attention, partly as a consequence of the politics of culture and identity as they played out among the Bengali literati of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[74] The following section discusses the origin, antecedents, and careers of both these trans-regional cosmopolitan languages in Bengal.

The Sanskrit Language and Literary Tradition

The earliest Sanskrit expressive literature in Bengal—mostly *prashastis* in praise of kings—dates back to the Gupta period. The courts of the Pala and Sena kings were associated with the production of well-known works such as the *Ramacharita* of Sandhyakar Nandy, the *Pavanaduta* of Dhoyi, and above all, the celebrated *Gita Govinda*

of Jaydeva. Nevertheless, the body of Sanskrit expressive literature or kavya produced in Bengal was not particularly large. This was counterbalanced by the great prestige and influence enjoyed by Sanskrit and the literature associated with it.[75] The great cultural and literary significance of Sanskrit lay in the fact that it existed as an overarching model over the literary universe of Bengal. In terms of subject matter and theme, grammatical elements such as *alamkara* and *chhanda* (meter), in poetic conventions of description and allusion, and in the terms that designated formal and generic typologies, it functioned as a giant reservoir from which poets and authors felt authorized to borrow. The reasons they drew upon the Sanskrit literary tradition are not hard to fathom—over thousands of years of its existence, the 'Sanskrit cosmopolis' had become firmly constituted as the prestige economy of the subcontinent and, at times, outside it as well.[76] Its prestige derived from its antiquity, its association with religious ritual and liturgical uses, and with a political culture associated with monarchical courts throughout India.[77]

However, literary production in Bengali—even when modelled on some conventions of Sanskrit literature—was never a simple emulation of it. As with cultural and literary borrowings in other times and places, the whole process of appropriation contained within it elements of selection, modification, rejection, and normalization. Bengali literary productions were ultimately marked by their own regional sensibilities.

Sanskrit, however, had a much more vigorous career in Bengal as the language of choice for intellectual and scholarly productions, related in particular to certain specific shastras.[78] From about the ninth and tenth centuries a large amount of Sanskrit scholarly literature (original as well as commentarial) was composed in Bengal, ranging from grammatical works, medical works, writings on Dharma-Shastra (Smriti) and so on.[79] The upsurge in cultural and literary creativity stimulated by the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was complemented by the emergence of a body of sophisticated intellectual discourse that included, among other works, Rupa Goswamin's *Bhakti Rasamrita Sindhu*, which embodied the endeavour at developing a new religious aesthetic.[80]

The Persian Language and Literary Tradition

The Persian language and literature in Bengal are linked, as is this language and its associated literature, to the subcontinent as a whole,

with developments in political history—that is, the establishment of Muslim regimes starting with the inception of the Delhi sultanate in the twelfth century. Although the prevalence and use of Persian in regions such as Sind, Multan, and Punjab are known for the period prior to the twelfth century, it was really the Turkish conquest of parts of northern India and the emergence of the Delhi Sultanate which made possible a stronger career for Persian language as a 'prestige language'. Persian thus acquired varying degrees of association with regional/provincial sultanates which had sprung up in various parts of India since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries onward.[81] The following discussion sketches out the career of Persian in the Deccan and Bengal prior to the Mughal period.

With the dismantling of the Delhi sultanate, its Indian territory was divided into many regional sultanates which vied with each other culturally as well as politically. This period, in fact, has been characterized as an age that witnessed the apogee of Persian culture in India.[82] Many of these sultanates, notably the Deccan-based Bahmani sultanate, established direct contact with Iran and encouraged the arrival of Iranian soldiers, statesmen, and merchants to places like the Deccan and Gujarat. Later, the kingdom of Golconda carried on the tradition of maintaining close contact with Iran and a Persianate culture. Educated and talented Iranians were encouraged to emigrate to Golconda and many were given high political offices there. An excellent example of this is provided by Mir Muhammad Sayyid Ardistani, later known in the Mughal imperial service as Mir Jumla.[83] In the sixteenth century, many of the rulers of the Deccan sultanates became Shiis as a result of the growing influence of and their alliance with the Safavid dynasty in Iran. This further strengthened the connection between parts of India and Iran and its Persianate culture. The competition among these regional sultanates resulted in 'a great diversification of Indo-Persian culture compared to its rather monolithic expression under the sultans of Delhi and later under the great Mughals'.[84]

The Genealogy of Persian in Sultanate Bengal

The development of Persian in Bengal is also associated with the introduction of Islamic rule in Bengal. Court rituals and ceremonies, particularly from the mid-fourteenth century began to be articulated in Perso-Islamic terms.[85] Thus, a Persian cultural ethos was certainly identifiable in the Bengal sultanate's courtly circles. The association of a Persianized culture with the political culture of royalty caused what

Subrahmanyam describes as a 'creeping shadow of Persianization'[86] from the edges of the Islamicate world of South Asia to reach the court of Roshang in the Arakan region, for instance, particularly during the fifteenth century.[87] The kings of Roshang, who were themselves Buddhists, cultivated an Islamicate political culture in which Persian elements were clearly noticeable.

Persian was used as a court language and a language of official business in late fourteenth and early fifteenth century Bengal. However, this status of Persian was shared with certain other languages as well. The role of the pre-Mughal sultans of Bengal in encouraging and patronizing literary productions in the local vernacular, Bengali, is well known. Such literary productions were mostly of the performative type (panchali) involving renditions of the epics or the Puranas into Bengali.[88] High officials of the Bengal sultans also used their own durbars to support and promote Bengali literature. The results of such patronage are evident in the composition of several Bengali Mahabharatas associated with authors such as Kabindra Prameshwar.[89] The patronization of expressive literature in Bengali by the sultans and their officials was motivated partly by their own interest in and enjoyment of such works, and partly to provide entertainment and enjoyment to their subjects who constituted an audience for such works. Arabic was also deployed for some very specific purposes—it was used on Hussain Shahi coins as well as on inscriptions and sometimes in bilingual Arabic/Persian inscriptions.[90] Thus, although not the sole official language, Persian shared that position partly with Arabic. However, there are no examples of non-documentary, creative literature in Persian from the period of the Bengal sultanate. Tarafdar explains this in terms of what he describes as Bengal's political isolation from northern India. The core heartland of the Delhi sultanate was where there was considerable prevalence of Persian, for political and governmental purposes, and also for the production of creative literature in various genres.[91] This could indeed be a part of the explanation for the non-existence of expressive Persian literary works in sultanate Bengal—but there might also have existed an element of active choice in the deliberate deployment of specific languages for specific purposes. Despite its relatively restricted use in the work of governance, however, a Persianate literary culture did strike roots in sultanate Bengal.

The strongest instance perhaps of the high respect accorded to Persian literature by the Bengal sultans lies in the contact initiated by sultan Ghiyasuddin of the Ilyas Shahi dynasty with the legendary poet Hafiz of Iran.[92] The Roshang court, in the seventeenth century in particular,

witnessed an efflorescence of vernacular Persianized literature—that is, poems in Bengali based on well-known Persian literary works. The work of Sayyid Alaol (1607–80), best known among the Roshang poets and regarded as the pre-eminent Muslim Bengali poet of the seventeenth century, contained strong manifestations of it. He rendered into Bengali several Persian literary pieces. Alaol himself was extremely familiar with the works of Nizami and rendered the latter's *Hafi Paikar* and the *Sikandarnamah* into Bengali.[93] Alaol, as well as other Bengali writers who produced literary compositions based on themes or stories from Persian literature, were, however, not engaging in an exercise of literal translation. At the hands of these writers, a strongly indigenous Bengali ambience was created for the basic themes drawn from Persian literary culture.

Bengal, and kingdoms such as Roshang, perceived Persian as a sophisticated literary culture that came to them from northern India. As Chapter 7 further illustrates, both during the medieval and early modern periods, Persian as well as some other northern India oriented literary cultures were regarded by Bengal's elites as being synonymous with the sophistication and high culture associated with royal courts. A cluster of Awadhi romances (*premakhyanas*) produced between the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, namely the *Chandayan* of Maulana Daud, the *Mrigavati* and the *Padmavat* of Malik Muhammad Jaysi, and the *Madhumalati* of Mir Sayyid Manjhan Rajgiri[94] produced resonances in the literary productions associated with the court of Roshang.[95] The poet Alaol's very first poetic work was in fact the *Lor-Chandrani*, inspired by Maulana Daud's Awadhi romance; Alaol later composed the *Padmavati*, derived from Jaysi's narrative of the same name.[96] Subsequently, many other *Padmavatis* were written by Muslim Bengali writers. Thus, alongside a Persian literary culture, an essentially north Indian Hindi-Awadhi culture also played a role in shaping courtly compositions in Bengali in the sixteenth century.

In pre-Mughal Bengal, non-Muslim elites had also begun to appropriate aspects of Islamicate/Persianized culture. Considerable segments of Bengali Hindu gentry and aristocracy formed part of the sultanate's administration. This factor became one of the most potent channels through which Islamization and Persianization in matters of dress, certain social practices, and literary tastes became evident among them.[97] Most scholars whose work has touched upon sultanate Bengal, such as Sir J.N. Sarkar, M.R. Tarafdar, Mohammed Enamul Huq, and Richard Eaton have emphasized the limited extent and nature of

Persianization in pre-Mughal Bengal.[98] It is indeed difficult to claim that it was a dominant cultural strand among the political elite of the sultanate as Subrahmanyam seems to suggest.[99] But, it was probably of greater significance and depth in the cultural history of the Bengal sultanate than commonly supposed.

This section has traced the main features of the three literary cultures—Bengali, Sanskrit, and Persian—which held sway in Bengal in the period preceding Mughal rule.

In the following section, I trace the genealogies of the principal terms and concepts, embedded in these literary traditions, which most closely approximate to what we would understand as 'history'.

The Genealogy of a Concept—I: Ithasa/Purana

In most South Asian languages including Bengali, the term for history is itihasa. An effort to trace the genealogy of the term indicates that it was in use from very early times in ancient India. The Vedic and Puranic literature shows frequent references to it, often in conjunction with the term 'purana', meaning ancient or old, which was used in the *Rigveda* as an adjective.[100] Its earliest use as a noun to denote ancient lore or a story occurs in the *Atharvaveda* and in the *Brahmanas*. By the beginning of the Christian era, a large cluster of narratives specifically called Puranas had come into existence. These texts, which occupied a position of central importance in ancient Indian religious tradition, were also considered to embody ancient Indian historical traditions.[101]

Defining the Puranas is a difficult task. The features that are supposed to distinguish them from other texts turn out to be paradoxical as well as contested. First, the very number of texts that qualify as Puranas is open to disagreement and the rough consensus (if it is a consensus at all) is that there were eighteen original Puranas or *Mahapuranas*. The substance of the Puranic texts is similarly controversial. The Puranas are supposed to be recognizable on account of their five features (*panchalakshana*) which were supposed to include accounts of the creation of the universe, the cosmic cycles, genealogies of sages and kings, exploits of the gods, and accounts of royal dynasties. But, in fact, many of the Mahapuranas contained materials which could not be contained within the panchalakshana definition—for example, the glorification of sectarian deities, new myths and legends, a discussion of social and ritual norms, etc. In any case, the Puranas or Mahapuranas refer to a corpus of Sanskrit texts which contained some or all of the traits listed above as part of the panchalakshana feature.[102] A striking

feature of the Puranic tradition lay in the fact that the Puranas did not represent a static tradition, but an essentially dynamic one marked by the continuous revision of its substantive materials primarily through additions, replacements, and modifications. Such processes by which the Puranas were constantly recast often occurred at different time periods and presumably in response to contingent contemporary needs. This ceaseless remaking and recasting of the Puranas also underscores the need for the Puranas to keep abreast of changing times and social conditions so that their importance as sources of religious, ritual, and social authority might not be rendered irrelevant.

It was probably inherent in the very nature of the Puranic process that the ever-present need to adjust to changing times would generate the birth of a related set of texts—the *Upapurana*s, which Doniger describes as the 'poor cousins of the already poor Mahapuranas' ('already poor' in relation to the authority and status assigned in Brahmanical culture to the Vedas for instance).[103] These Upapuranas consciously located themselves in the Puranic genre, and the principal characteristic feature of these texts was that their affiliations to specific regions were far stronger than in the case of the Mahapuranas. Secondly, they were even less concerned about adhering to the panchalakshana standard than the Mahapuranas. Most Upapuranas were written in areas peripheral to the core Brahmanical sphere of influence and, thus, Bengal became a venue where many Sanskrit Upapauranas were produced most likely between the eleventh and twelfth centuries.[104] The Upapuranas or portions of Purana texts composed in Bengal included the *Brahmabaibarta Purana*, the *Brihannaradiya Purana*, the *Devi Purana*, *Kalki Purana*, and some others. The circulation and use of these Puranas in Bengal is attested to by the fact that quite a few manuscript copies of these works in the Bengali script have been found, and some of these manuscripts can be dated to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[105] The ubiquity and popularity of the itihasa-Purana tradition in Bengal is further confirmed by a vigorous tradition of commentaries on these works which were produced in this region.

Accounts and stories embodied in the itihasa-Purana tradition, moreover, became an entrenched part of the lives of ordinary people in Bengal and were manifest in the use of Puranic allusions in proverbs, idioms of everyday speech, and in commonly held normative ideals.[106] The *Mangalkavya* narratives, which are discussed in Chapter 3, can be located in a range of vernacular Puranas that had descended lineally from the Sanskrit Upapuranas. Thus, the Puranic genre, in all its variations,

constituted a very important source from which various literary and narrative traditions in different South Asian languages drew sustenance for many centuries. It symbolized a mediating link between 'high' Brahmanical traditions, embodied most typically perhaps by the Vedas on the one hand and masses of popular, regional, and local customs and traditions on the other.[107]

The term itihasa derives etymologically from '*iti ha asa*' or 'thus really it was.' Both itihasa and Purana denoted types of narrative. The challenge in trying to track the genealogy of these terms lies in the fact that they were so often used together in Vedic and Puranic literature and, yet, one can detect tendencies to try to articulate distinctions among them as well as efforts to subsume one of these terms under the other. As Anand Swarup Gupta's analysis of these terms reveals, there were differences of opinion about the exact meaning and distinctions between itihasa and Purana even among ancient Indian commentators on Vedic texts.

There are also indications that the term Purana subsumed within itself both its own meaning (ancient or old) as well as the meaning of itihasa ('thus really it was').

What is most important and relevant for our purposes here is that there was also an amalgamation of both these terms to refer to bodies of stories or knowledge about the past. A famous passage from the *Vayu Purana* seems to suggest that Purana and itihasa were in fact used synonymously in this sense:

> That twice born (Brahmana), who knows the four Vedas with the Angas (supplementary sciences) and the Upanishads, should not be (regarded) as proficient unless he thoroughly knows the Puranas. He should reinforce the Vedas with the itihasa and the Purana. The Vedas (is) afraid of him who is deficient in traditional (thinking).[108]

This usage of itihasa and Purana is reinforced by the use of these terms in the *Brahma Purana*.[109] Thus, it is perhaps not untenable to hold that by the age of the Mahapuranas, both Purana and itihasa were being used to denote an established tradition of knowledge or stories associated with former times. The term *akhyana* (stories) was also treated in the older stratum of ancient Indian literature as slightly distinct from Purana. Yet, over time, all three terms—itihasa, Purana, and akhyana—came to be used interchangeably.[110] It is widely agreed that the Mahabharata was considered a work of itihasa; yet, it was

also considered to be a dharmashastra as well as a Purana and an akhyana, whereas in his commentary on the Mahabharata, Nilakantha expounded that *Puranam puravrittam* (the Puranas are stories about ancient times).[111]

Itihasa and Kavya

Itihasa, Purana, and akhyana were all forms of narrative literature or *sahitya*, the essential elements of which consisted of *shabda* (word), *artha* (meaning), and the inseparable unity between the two. Even within the sahitya tradition, itihasa, akhyana, and such others. were more particularly associated with kavya, which held a special pride of place in the Sanskrit literary tradition and was described as '*shabdarthau sahitam kavyam*'.[112] Formal discussions about the constituent elements of kavya and its definition were prevalent in South Asia for almost nine hundred years. The consensus is that kavya, as Pollock puts it, was essentially a 'verbal icon that was distinguished from all other types of narrative by the fact that the raison d'être of its type of expression is expression itself'.[113] Thus, itihasa, Purana, akhyana, and such others in the ancient Indian tradition were regarded as forms of narrative literature (to use modern terminology) rather than a distinct discipline that was devoted primarily to the evaluation of rational evidence as the basis of its accounts. Such criteria, as we know, came to be seen as the pre-eminent defining features of history writing from about the later nineteenth century.

In ancient India, beginning particularly from the AD seventh century, there began a trend of the production of 'historical kavyas' (Pollock's term) which underwent an ever-intensifying development in the following millennium. These narratives were most often composed in the context of royal courts and were, usually, the direct result of royal patronage. Mainly *charitas* or biographies of kings, these kavyas recounted the exploits and achievements of the royal personalities who featured as the principal subjects.[114] Kings and their exploits, as we know, were one of the commonest topics of history-writing in practically all ancient and medieval societies.[115] But, the pre-eminent literariness of these kavyas prompted literary scholars of the Sanskrit tradition ranging from A.B. Keith, S.K. De to Sheldon Pollock to agree that while these narratives possessed historical themes, they did not constitute history.[116] Indeed, if one is looking for history or itihasa as an autonomous, rational, evidence-dependent shastra in pre-modern India, then that search is likely to be futile. Kalhana's *Rajatarangini* is frequently seen as

one of the exceptional examples of 'proper' historical writing in ancient India.[117] Yet, Kalhana saw himself and described himself as a poet, as did Sandhyakara Nandy, author of the *Ramacharitam*.[118]

To move closer to the period that is the focus of this book, we find that the terms which most closely approximated 'history' in Bengali language narratives were terms such as itihasa, Purana, akhyana, *katha*, *itibritta*, and many others. Works such as the *Shabda-Kalpa-Druma* compiled at the initiative of Raja Radhakanta Deb in the nineteenth century and the *Bishwakosha* associated with Nagendranath Basu provide definitions of terms such as akhyana, itihasa, and katha, which suggest that they were regarded as being near-synonymous in meaning.[119] Thus, by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these terms were used in Bengali narratives to refer to stories or accounts of the past, which could be, and very often were, factual, or invented. The terms itihasa and Purana in particular were known and understood as representing ancient models replete with their own conventions regarding subject matter, inter-textual reference, and other parameters. I do not mean to suggest that canonical texts like the Puranas and the Ramayana and Mahabharata created certain normative conventions for writing about the past, which were then adhered to exactly, century after century, until such formulaic repetitiveness was abruptly halted by the impact of colonial rule and the introduction to India of the modern notion of history as a scientific, rational, and positivist discipline. If anything, arguing against such a notion is one of the aims of this work. I suggest instead that in medieval and early modern Bengal, the ancient conventions of itihasa were adhered to, sometimes in terms of subject matter, sometimes in terms of organization, and sometimes primarily in terms of terminology such as itihasa, akhyana, Purana, to signal that such works should be seen, at a certain level, as belonging to some well-known and respected ancient genres. However, as the subsequent chapters demonstrate, significant new features attuned to current conditions and concerns were often incorporated into texts which were titled or described as Purana or itihasa and intended, at a certain level, to be seen as such. But then, this tendency to incorporate new, different, and contingent issues was, as seen earlier, a feature of the Puranic corpus itself. Thus, the models or norms for writing about the past did not stifle the articulation of contemporary concerns and issues. Instead they provided templates endowed with legitimacy, authority, and sanctity on account of their long use and acceptance.

The Genealogy of a Concept—II: Tarikh

The Indo-Persian tradition of chronicle writing, or the tarikh tradition, formed a component in the intellectual and political culture described here as Persianization. This tradition had its roots in classic traditions of Arab historiography and then, subsequently, Persian historiography.[120] In its earliest stages, the terms '*(ilm) al-ahbar*' and '*tarih*' came closest to the concept of history in the Islamic world in that the former term initially denoted information about remarkable events (and thus became associated with the deeds and sayings of the Prophet Muhammad and ancient Muslim authorities) without necessarily meaning an organically connected series of events, whereas the latter term meant both date and era as well as works containing information about dates and eras. Subsequently, the term 'tarih' or 'tarikh' began to be used for annalistic or connected narratives about past events. The ninth and tenth centuries seem to have marked an important stage in this evolving tradition. First, the impact of philosophical and moral studies imbued the writing of tarikh with an ethical and moral rationale in place of the religious and theological rationale it had possessed earlier. Secondly, the authors of such narratives were no longer religious authorities but courtiers, government officials, and bureaucrats who drew upon official documents, personal contacts, court gossip, and other materials to compose their works. Gibb termed this the 'secularization' of history in the Islamic world.[121] Often, the authors of such works, 'would use past history merely as a background for the present'.[122] Thirdly, many such tarikhs revolved around what has been described as 'the ruler scheme of...presentation'—that is, the connected account of the reigns of various rulers of the past or contemporary time when the work was being composed.[123] This feature was derived presumably from Greco-Byzantine as well as pre-Islamic Persian nationalist traditions. The focus on the reigns of individual rulers as the structuring device of tarikh narratives was accompanied by copious details regarding the administration and governance of the rulers being discussed. Underlying this preoccupation with administrative details lay a more important interest in ethical and moral principles upon which systems of governance were ideally supposed to be based. The attention to the ethical actions of prominent individuals (such as rulers or their important officials, eminent religious personalities, and others) also established a biographical element into the Islamic historical tradition. In fact, 'history...became almost synonymous with biography'.[124] Finally, from about the twelfth century AD,

Arabic and Persian historiography began to diverge more widely. The Mongol conquests precipitated the process by which Arabic was supplanted by Persian in the zone of Perso-Turkish culture. This culture was introduced into India through Turkish military conquests and thus Indo-Islamic historiography came to be imbued with many of the features which had come to characterize the Persian tarikh or historiography tradition.

During the period of the Delhi sultanate, the production of works such as the *Tarikh-i-Mubarak Shahi* by Yahya bin Ahmad Sirhindi (written between 1428 and 1434) and the *Tarikh-i-Muhammadi* by Muhammad Bihamad Khani (completed in 1438–9), to name only two out of a large body of literature, attests to the currency of this tradition within the Indian subcontinent.[125] Rao-Shulman-Subrahmanyam rightly point out that there was a significant maturing of this tradition within the Indian subcontinent during the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, both in terms of density and substance.[126] A considerable number of such works was produced by the Mughal nobility associated with the adminsitrative-bureaucratic circles of the empire. Mughal royalty also featured as authors of such works.[127] Among this large body of Persian tarikhs, the pride of place in terms of its uniqueness goes, of course, to Shaikh Abul Fazal's *Akbarnama*, composed in the later sixteenth century.[128]

Other landmark Persian tarikhs of the Mughal empire included Abdul Qadir Badauni's *Muntakhab-ut-Tawarikh*, Nizamuddin Bakshi's *Tabaqat-i-Akbari*, the *Padshahnama* of Abdul Hamid Lahori, Muhammad Kazim's *Alamgirnama* and the *Ma'asir-i-Alamgiri*, and many others.[129] The impetus for tarikh production also led to the composition of Persian narratives that provided successive accounts of regional dynasties and rulers. The *Gulshan-i-Ibrahimi* (better known as the *Tarikh-i-Firishta*) of Muhammad Qasim Hindu Shah, composed in the Deccan in the early seventeenth century, is one of the best-known of such regional accounts. There are many other regional narratives of this type for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

By the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the tarikh tradition had been in use in the South Asian subcontinent for many centuries.[130] This intellectual tradition, too, had undergone shifts and changes in response to different historical situations and contexts within India, as well as to different regional contexts within the subcontinent. As Ali Anooshahr points out, from the late sixteenth century, for example, a number of extremely important tarikhs were written in which the history of

Muslim kingship within the Indian subcontinent was the primary focus, rather than accounts of pre-Islamic or Islamic Iran. Anooshahr characterizes this as a 'ground-breaking innovation in subject matter'.[131] The older tendency of writing universal histories which concentrated mostly on Islamic polities and societies outside India did not cease, but the innovation in framing the subject of tarikhs composed in India was significant. In some of the Persian tarikhs discussed in Chapter 5 of this book, the authors gave central importance to Bengal under the rule of Muslim kings and relatively less weight to Bengal's connection to the Mughal empire.[132] Other Bengal tarikhs—such as the *Siyar-ul-Mutakhirin* of Ghulam Hussain Khan Tabatabai—were more strongly conscious of the political relationship between the Delhi-based Mughal empire and Bengal.[133]

Other characteristic features of the mature tarikh tradition were to be seen in the use of the Persian language, a preoccupation with the mechanisms and institutions of political power as manifest through actions, policies, and calculations of rulers, nobles, and other governmental functionaries. Indeed, these narratives concentrated on recording the actions of grandees and ministers, thrones and imperial powers. Thus, the career of a ruler would detail his governmental policies and chart his relations with various other functionaries at different levels of the political system and the diverse factors such as trust, loyalty, and protection which anchored them. Similarly, the career of a nobleman would be traced through a series of official appointments and duties in the light of his relation with the king and service to the kingdom. Allusions and points of references were frequently taken from incidents in Islamic history and tradition associated with regions outside India. Significantly, the feature of inter-textuality, or references to earlier works which are regarded as authoritative, points to the fact that authors who wrote such works considered themselves as part of a Persian historiographical tradition. Tarikhs also very typically assigned central importance to sequential successions of rulers. In fact, the very organization of tarikhs attests to this. As seen above, this intense preoccupation with government derived from a deep concern with notions of ethical governance. Connected to this was the even deeper and more fundamental premise of such scholarship, that the events narrated in these works were actually a manifestation of divine will. This was one among many features singled out for criticism by twentieth century scholars who argued that the centrality given to divine will disqualified such works from being taken seriously as history.[134]

Chapter 5 of this book discusses a cluster of Persian tarikhs that were composed in Bengal during the later eighteenth century. These tarikhs embodied many of the characteristics discussed here. Tarikhs, whether from the wider Islamic world or within the Indian subcontinent, were treated as a branch of scholarship which formed an essential part of 'polite education'. It was part of the intellectual and cultural repertoire of a refined and sophisticated person, which explains its currency among political elites and in courtly circles.

Notes

1. Sir Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Bengal: Muslim Period 1200–1757*, Patna, 1973, (rpt).

2. I do not intend to suggest that culture in general is inherently linked to and dependent on political authority, but rather to focus on cases where political culture can and does affect certain literary, intellectual, and historiographic traditions.

3. Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, pp. 1–14, 187–215.

4. M.R. Tarafdar, *Hussain Shahi Bengal, 1494–1538* AD *A Socio-Economic Study*, Dhaka, 1965, pp. 90–122.

5. Ratnalekha Ray, *Change in Bengal Agrarian Society*, New Delhi, 1979, pp. 17–21.

6. Abdul Karim, *Murshid Quli Khan and his Times*, Dacca, 1963; Sarkar, *History of Bengal.*

7. P.B. Calkins, 'Formation of a Regionally Oriented Ruling Group in Bengal', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 29, no. 4, August 1970, pp. 799–806.

8. Kumkum Chatterjee, *Merchants, Politics, and Society in Early Modern India: Bihar: 1733–1820,* Leiden, 1996, pp. 101–27.

9. Sarkar, *History of Bengal,* pp. 455–67.

10. Ghulam Hussain Khan Tabatabai, *Seir Mutaqherin*, 4 vols, Nota Manus (tr.), Delhi, 1990; Ghulam Hussain Salim Zaidpuri, *Riyazus Salatin,* Maulavi Abdus Salam (tr.), Delhi, 1904; F.A. Gladwin, *A Narrative of Transactions in Bengal: A Translation of Salimullah Munshi's Tarikh-i-Bangala*, Calcutta, 1906; Mildred Archer, *Patna Painting*, London, 1947; Ratnabali Chatterjee, *From the Karkhana to the Studio: A Study in the Changing Social Roles of Patron and Artist in Bengal*, New Delhi, 1990.

11. There is a large literature on the growth of the English East India Company's commerce and political power in Bengal. Some representative

examples are Sarkar, *History of Bengal*; Sukumar Bhattacharya, *The East India Company and the Economy of Bengal from 1704–1740*, Calcutta, 1969; P.J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead: Eastern India, 1740–1828*, Cambridge, 1983; Chatterjee, *Merchants, Politics, and Society*.

12. Ray, *Change in Bengal Agrarian Society*; Shireen Akhtar, *The Role of Zamindars in Bengal, 1707–1772*, Dhaka, 1982; J.R. McLane, *Land and Local Kingship in Eighteenth Century Bengal*, Cambridge, 1993.

13. Sarkar, *History of Bengal*; Karim, *Murshid Quli Khan and His Times*; K.K. Datta, *Ali Vardi Khan and his Times*, Calcutta, 1963 (1939).

14. See, for example, Daniel and Alice Thorner, *Land and Labour in India*, Bombay and New York, 1960; N.K. Sinha, *The Economic History of Bengal From Plassey to the Permanent Settlement*, 3 vols, Calcutta, 1956–70; Ray, *Change in Bengal Agrarian Society*.

15. Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal*; Ray, *Change in Bengal Agrarian Society*.

16. Ray, *Change in Bengal Agrarian Society*.

17. S. Sen (ed.), *Kabikankan Birachita Chandimangal*, Calcutta, 1993; Mahimaniranjan Chakrabarti, *Birbhum Rajvamsa*, Calcutta, 1909, p. 62.

18. Ramram Basu, *Raja Pratapaditya Charitra*, Searampore, 1801, pp. 17–18, 44–6.

19. Shamita Sinha, *Pandits in a Changing Environment*, Calcutta, 1993.

20. Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, pp. 216–28.

21. Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Bengal under Akbar and Jehangir: A Socio-Economic Study*, Delhi, 1969, p. 86.

22. Some aspects of this phenomenon are described in Aniruddha Ray, *Adventurers, Landowners and Rebels: Bengal c. 1575–1715*, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 195–245.

23. Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, p. 216.

24. See Dinesh Chandra Sen, *Banga Bhasha O Sahitya*, vol. 2, Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyaya (ed.), Calcutta, rpt, 2002, pp. 555–707; Ashutosh Bhattacharya, *Bangla Mangalkabyer Itihasa*, Calcutta, 2002 (rpt), pp. 804–6; Dushan Zbavitel, *History of Bengali Literature*, Wiesbaden, 1976, pp. 165–6.

25. Raychaudhuri, *Bengal under Akbar and Jehangir*, p. 87.

26. D.C. Sen, *Banga Bhasha O Sahitya*, vol. 2: pp. 555–707; also Bhattacharya, *Mangalkabyer Itihasa*, pp. 811–22.

27. Literary scholarship in particular often does not distinguish clearly between Muslim rule and Mughal rule.

28. The strongest articulation of this view occurs in Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, pp. 497–8.

29. Mirza Nathan, *Bahristan-i-Ghaibi*, (tr. M.I. Borah), Gauhati, 1936, vol. 1, bk. 1: p. 2.

30. Ibid., 1: pp. 130–1.

31. Raychaudhuri, *Bengal under Akbar and Jehangir*, p. 84.

32. W. Pertsch (ed. and tr.), 'Kshitishvamsavalicharitam: A Chronicle of the Family of Raja Krishnachandra of Navadvipa, Bengal', in Mohit Roy (ed.), *Kshitishvamsavalicharit*, Calcutta, 1986, pp. 250–60.

33. Gladwin, *A Narrative of Transactions in Bengal*, p. 61.

34. Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, p. 300.

35. Nathan, *Bahristan-i-Ghaibi*, 1, bk. 1: pp. 14, 27. For the significance of gift-giving rituals, see Stewart Gordon (ed.), *Robes of Honour: Khil'at in Pre-Colonial and Colonial India*, New Delhi, 2003.

36. Nathan, *Bharistan-i-Gaibi*, vol. 1, bk. 1, p. 32.

37. Pertsch, *Kshitish*; Brajendranath Bandyopadhayaya and Sajanti Kanta Das (eds), 'Annadamangal', in *Bharatchandra Grantahbali*, 1369 BS, Calcutta, pp. 10–350.

38. Jnanendranath Kumar, *Vamsa Parichay*, vol. 24, 1350 BS, Calcutta, pp. 3–5; A.K. Roy, *Lakshmikanta: A Chapter in the Social History of Bengal*, Benaras, 1928, pp. 25–8; Bimanbehari Majumdar (ed.), *Gaurimangala by Raja Prithvichandra of Pakur*, Calcutta, 1971, p. xix.

39. Sukumar Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa*, vol. 2, 1405 BS, Calcutta, pp. 274–5. 'The son of the lord of Delhi' mentioned here was probably Shah Shuja, subahdar of Bengal from 1635–60, with some interruptions.

40. Satyanarayan Bhattacharya (ed.), *Kobi Krishnaram Daser Granthabali*, Calcutta, 1958, pp. 7–9.

41. Cited in S. Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa*, 2, pp. 858–9.

42. Bhattacharya (ed.), *Kobi Krishnaram Daser Granthabali*, p. 9.

43. Cited in S. Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa*, 2, p. 149.

44. J.F. Richards, 'The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jehangir', in *The Mughal State*, Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds), New Delhi, 1998, pp. 126–67; J.F. Richards, 'Norms of Comportment among Imperial Mughal Officials', in *Moral Conduct and Authority: The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, Barbara Daly Metcalf (ed.), Berkeley, 1984, pp. 255–89.

45. Richards, 'Formulation of Imperial Authority', p. 150.

46. Nathan, *Bahristan-i-Ghaibi*, vol. 1, bk. 1, pp. 17, 74.

47. Ibid., 1, p. 11.

48. Kunal Chakrabarty, *Religious Process: The Puranas and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, New Delhi, 2001.

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50. Haraprasad Shastri, 'Buddhism in Bengal since the Muhammadan Conquest', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 44, no. 1, 1895, pp. 55–64.

51. Jawhar Sircar, *The Construction of the Hindu Identity in Medieval Western Bengal. The Role of Popular Cults*, Institute of Development Studies, Occasional Paper No. 8, Kolkata, 2005, p. 38.

52. R.C. Majumdar, *History of Medieval Bengal*, Calcutta, 1973, pp. 188–217, 246–59; Sukhamoy Mukhopadhyaya, *Banglar Itihaser Du'Sho Bachar: Swadhin Sultander Amal (1338–1538)*, Calcutta, 1980, pp. 51, 82–91.

53. Mohammed Enamul Huq, *Muslim Bengali Literature*, Karachi, 1957; Asim Roy, *The Muslim Syncretist Tradition in Bengal*, Princeton, 1983; Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier: 1204–1760*, New Delhi, 1994.

54. Eaton, *Islam and the Bengal Frontier*, p. 226.

55. Eaton, *Islam and the Bengal Frontier*, p. 302; Tony Stewart, 'In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving the Muslim-Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory', in Richard M. Eaton (ed.), *India's Islamic Tradition, 711–1750*, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 363–92.

56. William Adam, *Reports on the State of Education in Bengal (1835 and 1838) including some Account of the State of Education in Bihar and a Consideration of the Means Adapted to the Improvement and Extension of Public Instruction in Both Provinces*, Anandanath Basu (ed.), Calcutta, 1941, pp. 59, 141.

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58. Ibid., pp. 277–9, 279–81, 284, 287.

59. Notable exceptions include Stuart Blackburn, *Print, Folklore and Nationalism in Colonial South India*, New Delhi, 2003; Abhijit Gupta and Swapan Chakravarti (eds), *Print Areas: Book History in India*, New Delhi, 2004; Anindita Ghosh, *Power in Print: Popular Publishing and the Politics of Language and Culture in a Colonial Society*, New Delhi, 2006.

60. The literature on this subject is extensive. Some notable examples include Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change*, 2 vols, Cambridge, 1979; Robert Darnton, *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1982; Roger Chartier (tr. Lydia G. Cochrane), *The Cultural Uses of Print in Early Modern France*, Princeton, 1987.

61. Juthika Basu Bhaumik, *Bangla Punthir Puhpika*, Calcutta, 1999.

62. Dinesh Chandra Sen, *Gharer Katha O Juga Sahitya*, Calcutta, 1969 (rpt), pp. 76–7; Rabindranath Thakur, 'Jibansmriti', pp. 6, 38, and 'Chelebela', p. 101 in *Rabindra Rachanabali*, vol. 11, 1989, Calcutta.

63. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Seir*, vol. 2: pp. 157–8.

64. Anonymous, 'Popular Literature of Bengal', *Calcutta Review*, vol. 13, January–June, 1850, pp. 257–84.

65. D.C. Sen, *Gharer Katha O Juga Sahitya*, pp. 76–7.

66. Adam, *Report*, p. 141.

67. Ibid., pp. 284, 287.

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69. See D.C. Sen, *Banga Bhasha O Sahitya*; S. Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa*.

70. S. Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa*, vol. 2, pp. 47–90, 311–36; Susil Kumar De, *Early History of the Vaishnava Faith and Movement in Bengal from Sanskrit and Bengali Sources*, Calcutta, 1986; Ramakanta Chakrabarti, *Bange Baishnab Dharma*, Calcutta, 1996; Abantikumar Sanyal and Ashoke Bhattacharya (eds), *Chaitanyadeb. Itihasa O Abadan*, Calcutta, n.d.

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74. On this point, see Murshed, *Kalantare Bangla Gadya*, pp. 180–98.

75. S. Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa*, vol. 1, pp. 19–37; Sushil Kumar De, *Bengal's Contribution to Sanskrit Literature and Studies in Bengal Vaishnavism*, Calcutta, 1960, pp. 76–9.

76. Sheldon Pollock, 'The Sanskrit Cosmopolis, AD 300–1300. Transculturation, Vernacularization and the Question of Ideology' in J.E.M. Houben (ed.), *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit: Contributions to the History of the Sanskrit Language*, Leiden, 1996, pp. 197–248.

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78. De, *Bengal's Contribution to Sanskrit Literature*, p. 22.

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82. Muzaffar Alam, Francoise 'Nalini' Delvoye, and Marc Gaborieau (eds) *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture. Indian and French Studies*, New Delhi, 2000, p. 25.

83. Jagadish Narayan Sarkar, *The Life of Mir Jumla, the General of Aurangzeb*, New Delhi, 1979; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Persianization and Mercantilism in Bay of Bengal History, 1400–1700', in *Explorations in Connected History: From the Tagus to the Ganges,* New Delhi, 2004, pp. 45–79.

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97. Sukhamoy Mukhopadhyaya and Sumangal Rana (eds), *Jayananda Birachita Chaitanyamangal*, Shantiniketan, 1994, p. 135.

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99. Subrahmanyam, 'Persianization and Mercantilism', pp. 53–7.

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101. F.E. Pargiter, *Ancient Indian Historical Tradition*, London, 1922; H.C. Raychaudhuri, *Political History of Ancient India from the Accession of Parikshit to the Extinction of the Gupta Dynasty*, Calcutta, 1953 (rpt).

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103. Wendy Doniger, *Purana Perennis: Reciprocity and Transformation in Hindu and Jaina Texts*, Albany, 1993, p. ix.

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106. Ibid., pp. 152–4.

107. K. Chakrabarty, *Religious Process*, p. 55.

108. Cited in Thomas B. Coburn, *Devi Mahatmya: The Crystallization of the Goddess Tradition*, Columbia, MO, 1985, p. 27.

109. Renate Schonen and Peter Shriner (eds and trs), *Brahmapurana*, Wiesbaden, 1989, ch. 42: 38cd–42ab.

110. Gupta, 'Purana, Itihasa. Akhyana', pp. 456–9; V.S. Pathak, *Ancient Historians of India: A Study in Historical Biographies*, New York, 1963, pp. 1–18.

111. Gupta, 'Purana, Itihasa, Akhyana', p. 461.

112. Sushil Kumar De, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, Calcutta, 1947; Edwin Gerow, *Indian Poetics*, Wiesbaden, 1977, p. 236.

113. Sheldon Pollock, 'Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out', in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History. Reconstructions from South Asia*, p. 51. See also, Gerow, *Indian Poetics*, p. 219 and De, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 41.

114. Pathak, *Ancient Historians of India*; Chandra Prabha, *Historical Mahakavyas in Sanskrit (Eleventh to Fifteenth Century AD)*, New Delhi, 1976.

115. Chronological accounts of kings and dynasties also featured as staples of 'modern' history-writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and beyond. The conscious and professed methodology followed here was of course different from either the 'historical kavya' or other forms of historiography of ancient and medieval times.

116. A.B. Keith, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, Oxford, 1966, pp. 144–53; De, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, pp. 345–9; Sheldon Pollock, 'Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out', pp. 41–53.

117. A.L. Basham, 'The Kashmir Chronicle', in *Historians of India, Pakistan, and Ceylon*, C.H. Philips (ed.), London, 1961, p. 58.

118. Sandhyakara Nandy, *Ramacharitam*, Radhagobinda Basak (ed. and tr.), Calcutta, 1969, p. 99.

119. Raja Radhakanta Deb, *Shabda-Kalpa-Druma*, Calcutta, 1931, pt. 1; Nagendranath Basu, *Bishwakosha*, 1317 BS, Calcutta, vol. 2, pt. 2.

120. Hamilton A.R. Gibb, 'Tarikh', in S.J. Shaw and W.K. Polk (eds), *Studies in the Civilization of Islam*, Boston, 1962, pp. 108–37.

121. Ibid.

122. Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography*, Leiden, 1968, p. 72.

123. Ibid., p. 87.

124. Ibid., p. 101.

125. Peter Hardy, 'Some Studies in Pre-Mughal Muslim Historiography', in C.H. Philips (ed.), *Historians of India, Pakistan, and Ceylon*, London, 1961, pp. 115–27; also Peter Hardy, *Historians of Medieval India: Studies in Indo-Muslim Historiography*, London, 1966.

126. Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time: Writing History in South India 1600–1800*, New Delhi, 2001, p. 223.

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128. Rao-Shulman-Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*, p. 223.

129. Abdur Rashid, 'Treatment of History in Mughal Official and Biographical Works', in C.H. Philips (ed.), *Historians of India, Pakistan, and Ceylon*, pp. 139–51.

130. Hardy, *Historians of Medieval India*; Mohibbul Hasan (ed.), *Historians of Medieval India*, Meerut, 1968.

131. Ali Anooshahr, 'Mughal Historians and the Memory of the Islamic Conquest of India', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2006, p. 278.

132. For example, Ghulam Hussain Salim Zaidpuri (tr. Maulavi Abdus Salam), *Ryazu-s-Salatin*, Delhi, 1975 (rpt).

133. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Seir*.

134. Hardy, *Historians of Medieval India*, p. 111.

2

The Genealogical Tradition

Genealogies constitute one of the commonest materials used to record the pasts of families, clans, and dynasties. This chapter discusses one of the most common and enduring forms in which the pasts of families and lineages were commemorated in Bengal. These genealogical materials from Bengal were known as *kulagrantha*s, *kulapanjika*s, *or kulaji*s. They possess a remarkable history, given that they were composed and used uninterruptedly for hundreds of years—stretching probably from the ninth and tenth centuries AD until about the mid to later nineteenth century.[1]

This chapter discusses the origin and development of kulagrantha literature, the challenge of assigning precise dates to them, and their substance. Secondly, it explores the cultural and ideological functions of the kulagranthas as well as their adjustments to contingent social and political realities. Finally, this chapter discusses whether kulagranthas constituted a form of collective historical awareness regarding developments in the past which had shaped the social lives of jati and *kula*-based communities in Bengal.

Origin and Development of Kulagranthas

In its most general sense, the term 'kula' meant family or clan (extended family); the terms *grantha* (book) and *panji/panjika* (chronicle) indicated that these materials were essentially genealogies of kulas or lineages which recorded the generational descent of the patrilineal Hindu family or clan over many centuries. In recording such descent, the kulagranthas claimed to commemorate the story of the developments

which were believed to have shaped the social and normative structure of Hindu Brahminical society in Bengal over hundreds of years.

The term kula, although generally denoting the clan or lineage, also signified, in this case, a distinct and somewhat unique meaning. Kula status denoted an elite position within the varna/jati configuration. A person possessing this status was described as a *kulina*—literally, one who belonged to a high status kula. This elite status, which was essential to become a kulina, was believed to be derived from spiritual and ritual purity which was manifest in the practices, deportment and inner qualities of those who were acknowledged as kulinas.[2] The status of being a kulina and the entire Bengali institution of 'kulinism' needs to be understood in the context of the varna/jati hierarchies which have been a characteristic feature of South Asian society for many centuries. It takes its place among the vast variety and form of regional variations and configurations of the 'universal' South Asian fourfold varna hierarchy.

The kulagranthas embodied the foundational narrative of how the institution of kulinism came to be rooted in Bengal. Secondly, these materials charted developments within the institution of kulinism over many centuries, focusing in particular on periodic shifts in hierarchies among kulina lineages and laid down the norms of social interaction among kulina families. The principal modalities of social interaction related to inter-marriage and inter-dining, but also included other forms of social and especially physical interaction. The narrative of the kulagranthas assigned central importance to a series of kings who were believed to have ruled different parts of Bengal roughly between the seventh and eight centuries AD and the twelfth century. These kingly personalities were represented as key figures in initiating and then shaping the most typical features of Bengal's kulinism. The first of such monarchs was king Adisura commonly believed to have initiated the process of social purification in Bengal by inviting five ritually and spiritually pure Brahmins (that is, purer than the Bengali Brahmins of the time, who were believed to have suffered a reduction in their spiritual and ritual prowess on account of exposure to undesirable influences such as Buddhism) from Kanauj in northern India to migrate and settle in Bengal. The descendants of these Kanaujiya Brahmins were designated a higher social status than Brahmin groups who were already settled in the region. This was also true of the descendants of the five Kayasthas who, according to many of the genealogies, had accompanied the five

original Kanaujiya Brahmins to Bengal. They were considered to be higher in rank than Kayastha families who were residents of Bengal prior to what most kulajis characterized as the defining event of Brahminical society in Bengal—the importation of ritually purer *sagnika* Brahmins from Madhyadesha, which was the heartland of Aryavarta and the seed-bed of a more pristine Brahminical culture. The other two monarchical figures who dominate the stories told by the kulajis were the kings Ballala Sena and Lakshmana Sena of the Sena dynasty.[3] Ballala Sena is generally credited with introducing the system of kulinism, that is, of formally designating some lineages of Brahmins as well as Kayasthas who had descended from the Kanaujiya immigrants as being of higher social status than others on account of their purer, superior virtues and practices.

To be designated a kulina thus meant a siginificant elevation in social status and rank vis-à-vis other lineages within the same jati. Ballala Sena's efforts at social ranking also extended, according to some kulajis, to the Baidya jati whose genealogies, however, do not associate them with the migration from Kanauj. The institution of kulinism was further modified and regulated by Ballala Sena's son and successor Lakshmana Sena[4]. Over time, the kulajis began to articulate an almost formulaic litany of nine specific virtues which were deemed essential for the attainment of kulina status. These virtues included correct behaviour, modesty, scholarship, the act of installing/establishing deities for the purpose of worship, dedication/commitment, meditation, charity, and undertaking of pilgrimage.[5] Several kings prior to the Sena rulers—usually represented as the descendants of Adisura—had also initiated reforms and new rankings among Brahmin lineages in particular. The kulaji chronicles, however, assign the greatest weight to the jati/kula reforms authorized by Adisura, Ballala Sena, and Lakshmana Sena as being the most significant ones.

Periodic evaluations and determinations of jati/kula rankings among the three dominant jatis of Bengal, that is, the Brahmins, Kayasthas, and Baidyas, continued to be undertaken by post-Sena potentates in Bengal—with varying degrees of power and authority, and social and political jurisdictions over many centuries—probably right into the nineteenth century. As depicted by the kulaji literature the institution of kulinism, with its associated modifications and shifts, continued to exert a fair amount of influence over the politics and reality of social status in Bengal even into the middle of the nineteenth century and beyond it as well.[6]

A view, not unanimously but widely articulated in the kulaji literature, was that the strengthening and formalization of the institution of kulinism by Ballala Sena and Lakshmana Sena in the twelfth century ushered in the practice of compilation and maintenance of genealogies of the kulina lineages associated primarily with the Brahmin, Kayastha, and Baidya jatis. These genealogies tracked not merely male generational succession within each kulina family, but paid special attention to recording the family's history of social interaction—particularly its marriage practices. Kulagranthas commonly associate Ballala Sena with having introduced (or at any rate tightened) the injunction regarding 'correct' marriage practices among kulina lineages. He apparently decreed that kulina Brahmins should only inter-marry with other kulina Brahmin lineages. Kulina Brahmins could marry the daughters of non-kulina Brahmins (known as Shrotriya Brahmins)—but the reverse was not to be permitted. The violation of this decree would result in the loss of kula status and thereby a decline in social status and material affluence, and even in total expulsion from kula society. This feature soon became the predominant, defining feature of kulinism in Bengal and during the post-Sena period, many jatis which had initially opposed and resisted the introduction or reification of kulinism by Ballala Sena, introduced it among themselves. The most common explanation for this is that the passage of paramount political power in Bengal into the hands of Muslim kings since the twelfth century meant that there was no longer an autonomous Hindu kingship (or, at least not one comparable to the Sena monarchy) which could grant material honours and entitlements to those deemed qualified to be kulinas. Kulinism within Brahmin, Kayastha, and Baidya jatis now came to be focused more strongly on regulating social and communal interaction since these types of purely social interaction now remained one of the few remaining spheres in which Hindu Brahminical jatis could act autonomously. The regulation of marriage practices came to represent the most typical attribute of high-status jatis and lineages in Bengal and these groups in effect constituted *samajas* or communities which were held together by intricate kinship networks resulting from marriage within the group. Many samajas were based on geographical contiguity and thus larger units like the Brahmins or Kayasthas came to be divided into smaller local communities such as Rarhi Brahmins (that is, Brahmins settled in the Rarh region or in lower Bengal), Barendra Brahmins (that is, Brahmins settled in northern Bengal or Barendrabhumi), and

Bangaja Kayasthas (Kayasthas settled in Banga which, for a long time, denoted the eastern part of Bengal in particular).

The birth of the chronicles known as kulagranthas is closely linked to the formalization of the institution of kulinism or *kula bidhi*, or *kula maryada* by Ballala Sena and Lakshmana Sena. Initially, the Sena monarchs formulated and authorized the norms of social and personal behaviour which were meant to define kulina status. These rulers supposedly appointed learned men, well versed in *kula-tattva*, that is, the principles of kulinism and the histories of kulina families, to hold the office of *kulacharya*. They also discharged the important task of creating and maintaining elaborate genealogical accounts of various kulina lineages with a view to building a fund of social and communal memory about the social behaviour (mainly inter-marriage) of these lineages. Thus was born the practice of composing kulajis or kulapanjis. The kulacharyas, also known as *ghataka*s, functioned as the chroniclers and archivists of different kulina communities and occupied leadership positions within them. In their hands, the compilation of genealogical materials was said to have become so systematic, that it came to be regarded as a discipline or shastra.[7]

Since the very maintenance of kulinism involved the evaluation of status and rank, the genealogies produced, maintained and updated by the kulacharyas and ghatakas played a central role in this continuous process by creating an archive of memory. The task of authorizing and supporting these periodic evaluations was continued by Hindu kings and zamindars in Bengal during the post-Sena period. Some of these potentates held high official and bureaucratic positions under the Muslim rulers of Bengal. These chieftains continued to appoint and support kulacharyas and to authorize the determinations of jati/kula-based hierarchies among Brahmins, Kayasthas, and Baidyas through assemblies called *samikarana*s or *ekjai*s.[8] This scenario in Bengal can be traced from the eclipse of the Sena monarchy into the nineteenth century.

Language, Format, and Function of the Kulagranthas

Bengal's kulagranthas as a genre were characterized by the fact that they were simultaneously textual and oral. For many centuries, kulacharyas had followed the practice of textualizing these materials, but one of the commonest forms of disseminating them was through oral performance (recitation/singing) at public occasions like weddings. Among certain jati-based communities, genealogies which were specifically intended to

be performed publicly were known as *dak*, *dak-gatha*, *dhakur*, *dhakuri*, and many others.[9] This oral dimension of the kulajis clearly ensured that their messages were widely disseminated and not restricted by a limited literacy.

The languages used in the kulajis were Sanskrit and Bengali.[10] Written kulaji texts used both languages—almost with equal frequency; the oral ones were most commonly in Bengali. The use of Bengali in these chronicles points to the actual need felt by those who produced and consumed these materials to ensure the widest possible transmission of the message articulated by these genealogies. The use of Sanskrit underlines the equally important need to give these materials the aura of antiquity, sanctity, formality, and legitimacy—almost a shastric character in fact.[11] The simultaneous occurrence of Sanskrit and Bengali passages in the same kulaji—both in written as well as oral texts—further reinforces the balancing act enacted by kulagranthas in terms of upholding an ancient, shastric image together with deploying a language used colloquially in order to broaden the sphere of their reception and impact. Almost invariably, the form used in the kulapanjikas was sloka.

Conditions of Production and Dating of Kulagranthas

The conditions in which these materials were produced and disseminated create a formidable challenge in terms of ascertaining their precise dates. These genealogies had been composed, used, and circulated in conditions prevailing in a pre-print culture.[12] Over the centuries, scribes made unintentional mistakes when copying and re-copying kulaji texts, and the oral dimension of kulagranthas meant that performance-related considerations caused frequent changes to be introduced in the text. Perhaps more than such textual instabilities, it was the lack—or the weak existence—of what Foucault calls the 'author function',[13] together with what I call the 'porousness' of texts, which combined to produce serious difficulties in the way of ascertaining the date/chronologies of the kulapanjis. Kulacharyas sometimes used older chronicles (especially those that were well-known and respected) but inserted new materials into them without always mentioning that this had been done. This was inevitable perhaps because of the perceived need to manipulate genealogies to suit existing social/cultural concerns while claiming the authority of well-established works whose credibility and legitimacy were less likely to be questioned. Yet, it was impossible to ascertain the number of times when a possibly ur-text (that is, if there ever was an ur-version)

was modified, enhanced with new terminology, or new substantive passages, and the like over several centuries through which it was referred to and used. The 'author function' described by Foucault was hard to identify in the case of kulajis (or for that matter in a vast range of other narratives known as panchali *sahitya*—including the Mangalkavyas, Ramayanas, Mahabharatas—which were produced in Bengal over several centuries including the period covered by the kulajis) whose generic integrity predominated over attributions and claims of individual authorship. The feature of 'porousness', that is, the practice of segments of particular works migrating into other texts without explicit acknowledgement that such a phenomenon was actually occurring, also contributed to the challenges associated with dating the kulagranthas.[14] Such random inter-penetration of materials from one text into another took place quite unrestrictedly since the modern notion (associated with the advent of print culture) of copyright, that is, the author's prerogative to exclusive ownership and proprietorship of his/her composition and the associated notion that no other author/compiler could make free use of it (without permission and/or acknowledgement), was practically unknown.

These conditions made it next to impossible to determine the dates and chronological sequence of the kulajis with any degree of certainty. I choose the methodological solution of reconstructing the forces of cultural politics in Bengal's history, and using them as a backdrop against which to map out the ideological trajectories and messages embodied by kulashastra.

The Substantive Dimension of the Kulajis

Very often kulajis provided basic 'trees' or barebone records of patrilineal descent within specific families.[15] But there were also genealogies which embedded the basic account of biological succession within a broader, comprehensive narrative regarding the status of a specific lineage as well as the social and political forces which shaped and moulded the hierarchies within various jatis. Romila Thapar terms this the 'narrative tradition.'[16]

The discussion here concentrates primarily on the genealogies of the Brahmin, Kayastha, and Baidya jatis of Bengal. These jatis dominated Bengali society for many centuries, both materially as well as in terms of status. These elite jatis (as noted by earlier scholars like R.C. Majumdar[17]) also produced many more kulagranthas and their chronicles often stretch back to the earliest stages in the grand account

of the evolution of Bengal's Brahminical society. Almost all kulagranthas of Bengali Brahmins, Kayasthas, and Baidyas either accepted, rejected, or modified the story about the settlement of five 'pure' Brahmins and possibly five Kayasthas from Kanauj. Many of the older kulajis, particularly of Rarhi Brahmins, recorded adjustments of ranks, grades, and hierarchies created by a series of rulers who are identified as the successors of king Adisura. But these pale in comparison to the weight and significance attributed by these chronicles to Ballala Sena's project of social engineering. Ballala Sena reportedly introduced the practice of kula bidhi among Kayasthas and Baidyas too. Many from these jatis, however, protested against this new practice and rejected it initially (the nature and significance of such dissent is elaborated below). Later however, some among the groups who had flouted Ballala Sena's kula bidhi also eventually created their own versions of it. The substantive core of the kulagranthas, apart from these two defining stories, was concerned solely with recording the process of constant adjustments and evaluations of jati/kula-based status.[18] Three elements combined to make such periodic adjustments possible, that is, the potentate or raja, the kulacharyas/ghatakas, and the jati-based samaja or *goshthi*.[19]

Since marriage practices had assumed the most important function in the determination of jati/kula-based rankings, the practice of periodic evaluations was intended to police and regulate marriage practices and also social behaviour to some extent. The criteria deployed by the triumvirate of raja-kulacharya-samaja/goshthi in this endeavour shifted with time since the contingent historical context clearly played a role in determining the principles which were selected to evaluate social behaviour and interaction. But the basic concerns, as represented by the kulajis, seem to have been as follows: preventing contact with people and groups deemed to be impure, that is, jatis/kulas of lower rank and status, and specific groups deemed to stand beyond the pale of the varnashrama configuration; condemning marriage practices and social interaction with specific lineages and/or jatis deemed to have violated the norms of social interaction mandated for them; condemning and regulating generally unacceptable, anti-social behaviour such as committing a murder. In the 'early' period of kulaji production (the Sena period and the pre-Sena period) total 'outsiders', or those who could not be ranked within the varna/jati/kula hierarchies, included such dreaded, despised, and feared groups like the Buddhists; in the post-Sena centuries, '*yavanas*' or '*mlechchas*' identified mostly with Muslims, filled that position.

Remarkably, women are virtually absent in the kulagrantha corpus. In accounts of marriage transactions, the identity of the bride's father or the patrilineal clan are specifically mentioned. The bride herself remained forever nameless. Women therefore, seemed to be invisible. Yet, paradoxically enough, the kulajis themselves testify to the fact that despite the strongly patriarchal ideology articulated by these materials, women played critically important roles in this system of status and rank which was dependent on the performance of the right kind of social conduct and interaction. High status Brahmins and Kayasthas, for example, were permitted to take brides from families lower in rank than themselves; but the reverse would spell social disaster for a family and its related clan group.[20] Thus, despite their ostensible invisibility in the kulapanjis, women, or rather the status of the families they married into, had a very real impact on the prestige and rank of their natal families. Moreover, by the fifteenth century or so, one set of influential rulings or reforms that were authorized by Debibar Ghatak for kulina Rarhiya families quite openly tied the determination of kula status and rank to the physical and behavioural purity of women who were to be partners in marriage to men of Rarhiya kulin lineages. The lack of physical and behavioural impurity was seen to derive from factors such as the possession of physical deformities, being orphaned, raped, being older in age than the bridegroom, and other such factors. The behaviour of men was also a determining factor, at least theoretically, in the ever-shifting equations of behaviour and rank.[21]

The kulagranthas also collectively articulated certain key ideological concerns of Brahminism.

Ideological Function of the Kulagranthas

The central ideological concern of the kulagranthas, and indeed the principal reason for the emergence of kulashastra, was the upholding of a Brahminical social and cultural order and the defence of this order vis-à-vis the forces that threatened to undermine it.[22] Two other sets of texts which shared the same ideological concerns were the Bengal Puranas or Upa-Puranas as they are known and the smriti texts of Bengal which were mostly authored during the medieval period.[23] The Upa-puranas of Bengal and the smriti literature in fact serve as critically important complements to the kulapanjis and help us to understand them better. In seeking to defend the boundaries and validity of Brahmanism, the kulajis identified the deviant 'other' with which it

needed to wage its ideological battles. It is with regard to this that the kulagranthas exhibited a fascinating ability to articulate their core, long-term cultural concerns on the one hand, and on the other to adjust their discourse to fit the contingent anxieties of the times when they were composed or recast. Thus kulajis, or segments of kulajis, which described the origin of kulinism at the court of Ballala Sena identified Buddhists and Tantrics as the dangerous subversive 'others'. The articulation of the emergence of kulinism as a necessary bulwark against the enemies of Brahminism such as Buddhists and Tantrics makes it likely that these accounts reflect the anxieties of the twelfth century and the period immediately preceding it. Post-twelfth century Brahminical concerns were reflected in the kulajis' worries about increasing physical and social contact with Muslims who were being identified as the source of the gravest threat. Yet, through this process, certain key features which characterized the kulajis and, in fact, had come to be associated with the very tradition embodied by the Bengal kulagranthas were preserved carefully. Kulajis thus continued to provide accounts of marriage practices of various lineages; to give foundational importance to the story of the importation of Brahmins and Kayasthas from Kanauj; and to regard both Ballala Sena and Lakshmana Sena as the principal architects of the system of kulinism in Bengal.[24]

It was critically important thus, for a corpus of materials such as these genealogies, to preserve the tradition it constituted. The kulagranthas certainly provide us with an invaluable glimpse of the discourses through which these materials sought to identify what they perceived to be the dangerous forces ranged against Brahminism; they also shed light on the politics of culture, status, and ideology in Bengal during the medieval and early modern periods. The following sections discuss first the depiction in the kulagranthas of the ideological concerns during the reign of Ballala Sena, and second the ideological concerns of the period following the twelfth century.

Ballala Sena's 'kula bidhi' and Cultural/Ideological Forces in Bengal Between the Eighth and Twelfth Centuries

The competition and conflict among various religious and cultural traditions in Bengal—Brahminism, Buddhism, and Tantra—during the period prior to the twelfth and thirteenth centuries has been referred to in Chapter 1. Many of the older kulagranthas, particularly of various Kayastha communities, Barendra Brahmins, and the Baidyas, shed interesting light on the tangled contests among different

shades of ideology at the court of the Sena rulers and suggest that the introduction of *Ballali maryada*, as kulinism was sometimes called, may have been intimately associated with a broader project of social engineering attempted by the king partly in response to the pressures generated by the politics of ideology and culture of the time.[25] The chronicles of several Kayastha lineages state that Ballala Sena, although a champion of Brahminism, was also attracted to Tantrism, both 'Buddhist Tantrism' and 'Hindu Tantrism'.[26] But apparently, the anti-Buddhist pressure exerted on him by the Shaiva and Shakta Brahmins, who were reportedly close to the king, compelled Ballala Sena to oppress and persecute the Buddhists.[27] Buddhists who came to accept the supremacy of Brahmins, particularly those among the latter who were being promoted by the king were apparently given the status of *Shudra*s from whose hands it was permissible to accept water for drinking (*jalacharaniya Shudra*). Other Buddhists who resisted the pressure to acknowledge the social predominance of Brahmins were cast out of mainstream society at the order of the king.[28] Ballala Sena was also supposedly involved in acrimonious relations with the Suvarnavanika jati of his kingdom. The Suvarnavanikas apparently resisted the king's efforts to extort money from them and their unwillingness made them the objects of royal displeasure. Ballala Sena declared that their jati rank should be reduced and placed at the level of the lowest possible Shudra jatis from whom drinking water could not be accepted (*anacharaniya Shudra*).[29] Nagendranath Basu is skeptical about this story,[30] but it is significant that many centuries later, many from the Suvarnavanika jati were drawn into the fold of the Gaudiya Vaishnava movement by Nityananda, a close associate of Sri Chaitanya known for espousing the more socially egalitarian principles of the early Gaudiya Vaishnava movement, that is, disregard for varna/jati hierarchies and the social hegemony of Brahmins.[31] Secondly, the testimony of Anandabhatta's *Ballalacharitam*, a sixteenth century work, illustrates at least a historical memory of animosity nurtured by groups of Suvarnavanikas in Bengal towards Ballala Sena.[32] Thus, the introduction of Ballala Sena's kula bidhi might need to be contextualized against a wider impulse towards social engineering along the lines of varna/jati hierarchies which were perceived to comprise the core of a dharmic Brahminical social order.

Ballala Sena thus used the criterion of faith in the foundational elements of Brahmanism, to push downwards the jati status of both the Buddhists and Suvarnavanikas. Interestingly enough the latter use the same criterion to tarnish the king's reputation for posterity by

posing questions regarding his conformity to Brahmanism. Both the disgruntled and marginalized Buddhists and the Suvarnavanikas are reputed to have been the source from which unsavoury rumours about Ballala Sena were generated.[33]

Anandabhatta's *Ballalacharitam*, believed to represent the Suvarnavanika point of view, alleged that Ballala Sena indulged in secret Tantric rites including sexual orgies with low-caste women and prostitutes. Furthermore, the king was reportedly infatuated with a young woman who was either from the Dom jati, or the daughter of a leather worker—in either case, from the lowest possible background in terms of varna/jati rankings—and worse still, he may even have married her.[34] The king was thus personally guilty of transgressing the norms of social conduct through a sexual and marital relationship which was completely prohibited by varna/jati rules. What is significant in this episode of hostility between the king and the Buddhists and Suvarnavanikas is that all parties took a stand in which the overarching normative principle was Brahminism and any deviation from it was to be censured and condemned. Thus, in the discourse of the kulagranthas, rhetoric about the preservation of the Brahminical order became the idiom through which the politics of culture, ideology, and status were played out.

Many other high-status groups within Brahminical society—such as some Barendra Brahmins and the Barendra and Uttar Rarhiya Kayastha communities—also rejected and challenged the institution of kulinism introduced by Ballala Sena. According to their kulajis, the institution of Ballali maryada was a violation of customary rankings among various jatis as well as of the pattern of social relations (including marriage practices) prevailing among them; it also transferred too much power into the hands of the king who could misuse it to settle personal vendettas and petty sectarian rivalries.[35] There are sufficient indications in the kulajis that many Brahmin communities in Bengal too had become influenced by Tantra. According to his opponents, Ballala Sena had apparently introduced his kula bidhi in an attempt to bestow kula status on those of his Brahmin and Kayastha allies who too had accepted certain Tantric practices and beliefs or, at any rate, refrained from openly attacking him for straying from the dharmic path by succumbing to the attractions of Tantra. Thus, according to the genealogies of those lineages who defied the Ballali maryada, kulinism was a ploy to elevate those Brahmins and Kayasthas who had strayed from the right path of uncorrupted Brahminism and to camouflage

it in terms of a newly enunciated set of mandatory practices called *kulachara* which were nothing but Tantric practices recycled into the highest levels of varna society as new and strict requirements.[36] Here too, what is interesting is that the king was condemned because he had apparently failed to stay on the path of undiluted, pristine Brahminism. In other words, critiques of kulinism were also cast in the kulajis as the discourse of Brahminism or rather the need to protect and preserve it from polluting and dangerous influences.

The Ideological Concerns of the Post-Twelfth Century

The previous section serves as a backdrop which illustrates the cultural and ideological politics which underlay the emergence of Ballala Sena's kula bidhi. In this section I focus on the ways in which kulajis mirrored the cultural and ideological environment of Bengal since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In this period, the Muslims or yavanas were perceived to be the most potent threat to the Brahminical social order though not the only ones. The discourse of the kulagranthas rarely—if ever—distinguished between the reigns of the pre-Mughal sultans and the Mughals (including the nawabs of Murshidabad) over Bengal. Hence, it is not possible to separate the treatment of Muslims in Mughal Bengal from an earlier period. To do so would also be to violate the sensibility of the kulagrantha tradition to which it was irrelevant whether a Muslim ruler or nobleman was associated with the Bengal sultanate or the Mughal regime. This section, however, demonstrates with great clarity how a long-lived textual/oral tradition such as the kulajis articulated the professional as well as cultural interactions among people of high-status kulas and jatis on the one hand and Muslim elites on the other.

The period of Sultanate rule (thirteenth–sixteenth centuries) as well as the subsequent period of Mughal rule in Bengal, witnessed the association with it of Hindu Bengali landed gentry and aristocracy. Literate, upper class and usually upper-caste Hindus, such as Brahmins, and Baidyas and Kayasthas in particular, did remarkably well through their involvement in bureaucratic positions in the government.[37] The deepening professional interaction between high-status lineages and those perceived as representing the forces of Islam also created a degree of cultural interaction between these two groups—a scenario that was regarded as gravely dangerous by Brahminical authorities. This phenomenon is supposed to have grown stronger particularly since the time of Raja Ganesh (AD 1410–18) and the latter's son Sultan

Jalaluddin (AD 1418–31).[38] There is no evidence that subsequent sultans of Bengal, or later the Mughal regime and the government of the nawabs of Murshidabad, had reversed this trend.

Scholars like R.C. Majumdar and M.R. Tarafdar agree that there was a new urgency in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to rewrite older kulagranthas and compose new ones. Both agree that the impetus behind this probably lay in the dangers perceived to be posed to Brahminical society by Islam.[39] But, there were other forces also that were regarded as potentially threatening by Brahminical authorities. These 'newer' threats included Gaudiya Vaishnavism, particularly its perceived socially radical agenda as well as the intellectual discipline of *navya nyaya* which had become associated with particular centres of scholarship and learning in Bengal. Thus, there may indeed have been potent reasons for Brahminism to try to raise its ramparts and lock its doors, at least in principle, during this period. Many of these concerns harboured by Brahminism in medieval Bengal came to be manifested in the *Navya Smriti* literature of the period and in the kulagranthas of many high-status Brahminical jatis which were composed and/or redacted during the thirteenth to sixteenth centuries and possibly beyond. The codification of the Bengal smritis during the medieval period, and particularly the work of Smarta Raghunandan, should be seen as Bengal Brahminism's anxiety to regulate the boundary between varnashrama-based social organization and conduct on the one hand and subversive forces such as Gaudiya Vaishnaviam, navya nyaya and, of course, Islam, on the other. Contemporary texts bear out the intesity of such fears. Brindabandas's *Chaitanya Bhagavata,* reported, for example, the fears generated among the orthodox Brahmins of Nabadvipa by those who had begun to adhere to the teachings of Sri Chaitanya, especially Brahmins who had become attracted to the message of the early Gaudiya Vaishnava movement in Bengal. In Brindabandas's words:

These [Vaishnava] Brahmins will destroy the kingdom/ famines will occur because of them [i.e. their sinful activities]

Upon hearing this, the pashandis [i.e. heretics—this term was once reserved for Buddhists] almost died in fear/ They [the Vaisnavas] drink alchohol under cover of the darkness of the night

They all know the Madhumati Siddhi [associated with Tantra]/They recite mantras at night and then bring in five women [Panchakanya]

Various other objects [i.e. associated with Tantric rituals] are also brought to them/[these include] things that are to be eaten, fragrances of various kinds, garlands and different kinds of clothes

After eating [those foods] they engage in sexual activities with them [i.e. the Panchakanya][40]

As this passage indicates, the old fear of Buddhists and Tantrics had not been completely eliminated. Anxieties about religious and cultural movements which derived from Brahminism tended to be couched in the vocabulary that had been used to demonize and marginalize them in the earlier kulajis (pre-Sena and Sena period) and in the Bengal Puranas and Upa-Puranas. Sri Chaitanya himself was described as wicked (*dushta)* and degenerate (*nashtamite baro)* in the kulaji chronicle attributed to Nulo Panchanan.[41] In fact, to kulacharyas like Nulo Panchanan, the newer cultural and intellectual influences current in Bengal during that time, that is, Sri Chaitanya and his Gaudiya Vaishnava movement as well as navya nyaya associated with Raghunath Shiromoni, were 'thorns' (*kanta*) in the task of maintaining a dharmic social order grounded in varnashrama principles. In verses attributed to Nulo Panchanan, he mourned the fact that in these times,

a [social] crisis became apparent in the Rarh and Banga regions (that is, southern and eastern Bengal) and the reputation of the great lineages in these areas became dim in terms of their moral/dharmic luster. [42]

Islam, however, was regarded as a more serious threat. Not only was it castigated as a dangerous and different religious tradition with a new set of cultural practices, it was also seen as a political force with the ability to influence and attract those affiliated to Brahminism with possibilities of material advancement. Not surprisingly thus, the Brahminical authorities continued to vilify Muslims too in terms not significantly different from the ones that had been deployed earlier to condemn Buddhists and Tantrics. One of the most important mechanisms available to Brahminism was to continuously police its internal and external margins through periodic reforms known as samikaranas and ekjais. In the case of Islam, it was not enough to depict it as a source of danger and subversion to the varna-based social order; something more concrete needed to be done to contain the potential havoc it could wreak on Brahminical society. In the discourse of the kulagranthas, this was manifest in two separate sets of reform initiatives

which were launched during the medieval period to protect the jati/kula-based social order. One set of reforms was initiated by the famous Barendra Brahmin *kulaguru*, Udayanacharya Bhaduri who lived during the early fifteenth century. The second set of reforms was associated with Debibar Ghatak, one of the most well-known Rarhiya Brahmin kulacharyas during the later fifteenth century.

The Reforms of Udayanacharya Bhaduri

Udayancharaya Bhaduri was reputed to have carried out reforms among Barendra Brahmins with the support and patronage of Raja Ganesha, or Sri Ganesha Datta Khan as he is referred to in the kulagranthas. Another famous kulacharya who collaborated in the launching of these reforms was Kulluk Bhatta.[43] The basic premise of these reforms was derived from the concern generated by the inevitable physical and social proximity and contact that came to exist between highly placed Barendra Brahmins and Muslims associated with the ruling circle. In the purity/pollution paradigm that underlay the vocabulary of the kulajis, the discomfort at such goings on found expression in charges that Barendra Brahmins were being physically 'touched', insulted, and harassed by Muslims.

Udayanacharya Bhaduri's reforms were aimed at combating and countering such developments. This was accomplished by first creating categories of non-normative or polluting behaviour evident among the Barendra Brahmins. Secondly, an effort was made to devise solutions (*vyavasthas*) to such problematic behaviour. The instances of wrong conduct were divided into two categories known as *aaghat* (literally, 'injury' or 'hurt') and *abasad* (literally, 'devoid of energy' or, 'lack of lustre').[44] The terminology itself is interesting. They seem to suggest, conceptually, at least, that instances of anti-normative behaviour resulted in the diminution of the Brahmins' ethical energy or lustre or, even worse, caused an injury—almost a bump or a dent—in the dharmic strength of that Brahmin. In the case of the aaghat, the transgressive behaviour was noticed and recorded, and presumably, the individual who had committed the transgression as well as his family and those who came into contact with them, were supposed to bear the taint and censure embodied by the aaghat. In the case of the abasads, however, the kula authorities came up with solutions or vyavasthas for the removal of the abasad.

The largest numbers of aaghats listed in these reforms involved occasions of contact between Barendra Brahamans and Muslims. These included the Bharataghat which had been generated when a certain

Bharatacharya had been 'harassed' by a Muslim soldier, and the Kafur Khani aaghat which resulted from a certain Purandaracharya being again 'harassed' by a soldier of Kafur Khan. The efficacy of the taint or injury lay in the manner in which it spread to others who came into contact with the transgressor either through marriage connections or through social interaction.[45] The other category of transgressive behaviour called abasad, were sixty-eight in number and the overwhelming majority of these were focused on cases of improper contact with Muslims.[46] A typical example would include among others, the Almas Khani abasad which owed its origin to an incident in which a certain Sidhu Karial was (yet again) 'harassed' by Almas Khan's soldier.[47]

The principal distinction between the aaghat and the abasad lay in the fact that there were no formal provisions in these reforms for the removal of the former, while kulacharyas devised solutions (vyavastha, *nishkriti*) in the case of the latter to relieve the transgressor of the burden of having to bear the taint for a long time, or even permanently.[48] Both categories of transgressions—particularly the abasads which could be expiated—indicates that the norms of social conduct laid down by kulagurus could not be enforced. The reasons for this state of affairs have been addressed below.

The Reforms of Debibar Ghatak

The reforms of Bandyaghotiya Debibar Mishra or Debibar Ghatak were known as *mel bandhan* and should be regarded as a response to the crisis which was deemed to have befallen the elite jati of kulina Rarhiya Brahmins. As in the case of Udayanacharya Bhaduri's reforms for the Barendra Brahmin community, here too, an important component in this crisis was believed to lie in a situation in which highly placed, respected kulina Rarhiya Brahmins, were engaged in close professional, social, and cultural interactions with upper class Muslims—particularly those associated with the ruling class of the Bengal sultanate. Kulajis described the social/cultural interaction among high-status Hindu jatis and Muslims as a huge moral and social crisis—practically a 'revolution' (*viplava*). In the discourse of the kulagranthas, a glaring example of this was the fact that Muslims, according to them, had started showing up at high-status Hindu homes when ceremonies such as marriages were in progress with the deliberate aim of causing a scandal.[49]

Debibar's mel bandhan represented a response to this situation (as also to other threatening forces). In these reforms, Debibar (like Udayancharya before him), identified the various kinds of *dosha*s or violations which

had been committed by kulina Rarhiya Brahmins. The doshas ranged from the murder of a Brahmin to marriages between kulinas and non-kulinas.[50] An important dosha listed in the *mel karikas* was 'yavana dosha', that is, a taint produced through contact or interaction with Muslims.[51] The *Magh* and *Firinghee* doshas resulted from contact with Europeans, specifically, the Portuguese and those associated with them.[52]

The next big step in Debibar's reform involved the division of kulina Rarhiya Brahmins into units called mels which derived from a specific dosha or violation committed by a prominent member of the lineage. Debibar Ghatak is said to have created thirty-six such mel divisions. Practically every mel was perceived to be contaminated to a greater/lesser degree by the yavana dosha.[53] Rarhiya kulina families deemed to have committed doshas were not directly expelled from the Rarhiya kulina Brahmin community. Theoretically, the mel bandhan scheme created a new configuration of 'polluted' families whose taint was thereby recognized and contained by the kulagurus. A new pattern of marriage practices arose which were to be conducted, as authorized by kulacharyas, within the circle of 'contaminated' lineages.[54] On the one hand, Debibar Ghatak's mel scheme was represented as an example of the strictness of kulina society and the toughness and vigilance of its kulacharyas who did not apparently hesitate to hang labels connected with specific doshas or offences on to the reputations of well-known kulina lineages. But, as some post-Debibar kulacharyas (for example, Nulo Panchanan) and some modern scholars (for example, Nagendranath Basu, M.R. Tarafdar) agree, mel bandhan actually represented a strategic compromise and, simultaenously, a way of preserving Rarhiya kulina Brahmin society from complete extinction.[55] It was an indirect way of recognizing that the rules supposed to govern marriage practices had become so very restrictive that they could not actually be followed.[56] In large measure, the un-enforceability of kula rules was due to the socio-political reality of medieval Bengal. This point is further discussed below. Nulo Panchanan who probably lived a century or so after Debibar, voiced the doubts and dissatisfaction of those who considered the mel bandhan scheme a step that paved the way for the doom and degeneration of Rarhiya kulina Brahmin society. 'Debibar', wrote Nulo Panchanan, 'planted a poison tree (*bisha briksha*) which (should have) been exterminated'.[57] The 'poison' in Debibar's reform, according to Nulo Panchanan inhered in the fact that it allowed ignorant, non-virtuous people to continue holding the rank of kulina because of considerations of heredity.

The foregoing section showed that some of the principal preoccupations of kulashastra, from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and beyond, was to devise solutions to the problem of socio-cultural contact between high-status Brahminical jatis on the one hand and Muslim ruling circles on the other. Yet, while Udayancharya Bhaduri and Debibar Ghatak were attempting to police the boundaries of Brahminism, the same centuries witnessed the incorporation into these genealogical materials of statements proclaiming the close association of many kulinas belonging to high-status lineages with a variety of Muslim regimes in Bengal. What makes these statements particularly significant is that these were not oblique, implicit suggestions, but direct statements which proudly declared the receipt of high office, material rewards, and honours from various pre-Mughal sultans of Bengal, the Mughal provincial administration of Bengal as well as the government of the Murshidabad nawabs over the region. Banikanta Ray, an important member of the Barendra Kayastha community as well as his brothers Rambhadra and Ramanath held high office in the administration of Sultan Alauddin Hussain Shah.[58] A kulaji, identified by Nagendranath Basu as the kulagrantha of Jadunandan Das commemorated their high office as follows: 'Rambhadra [and] Ramanath Majumdar [were employed] in Bengal's kanungo serista.... [Their brother]...Banikanta Roy [was] roy-royan of Bengal....'[59] Rajyadhar Ray of the Barendra Kayastha community held the office of *wakil* in the Bengal administration at the court of the Mughal emperor. A kulaji text, also supposed to be a version of Jadunandan's Dhakur grantha said, 'Roy Rajyadhar, [he] received great honours from the [Mughal] badshah...[he was] the Bengal ukil [wakil] at the [court of] the badshah...'.[60] Some of these lineages continued to serve and hold high office despite dynastic and regime changes in Bengal. A good example is furnished by the case of Devidas Khan, of the Barendra Kayastha community who served Daud Khan Karrani, the last Afghan sultan of Bengal, and was also associated with the subsequent Mughal administration.[61] The Sanskrit *Kshitishvamsavalicharitam*, records how Bishwanath, an ancestor of the rajas of Nadia, secured recognition as 'raja' from the 'mlechcha' conqueror of Delhi called Mahmud of Ghazni. According to this genealogy, 'Bishwantha, having [successfully] pleased the yavana king, secured Kankdi and various other territories which had not been part of his ancestral estate and ruled as a particularly reputable *(prasiddha-pratapa)* raja for thirty one

years'.[62] These examples represent a mere fraction of the countless that are depicted in the kulagranthas. These cases suggest a paradox between the concerns of kulagurus like Udayancharya and Debibar on the one hand and the actual socio-political realities of medieval and early modern Bengal on the other, whereby the path to material power lay through association with Muslim ruling regimes. And such material power, as will be seen below, was critical to the attainment of prestige, high status, and leadership within the jati-based community. It is true that the references in the kulajis to cases of individuals belonging to high-status lineages holding office in the administration of Muslim rulers seldom strayed beyond this paradigm to explicitly mention instances of close personal and social contact with Muslims. The only unusual, atypical and yet, extremely significant example of this relates to the Barendra Brahmin zamindars of Bhaduria and Ektakia in northern Bengal. The genealogies of these zamindars took pride in their service to various Bengal sultans and Mughal emperors and also made direct references to the marriages of several men of these lineages to Muslim noblewomen.[63]

The kulagranthas also indicate quite clearly that the material clout acquired by various high-status Brahminical lineages through service to Muslim rulers translated directly into leadership positions for them within their jati/kula-based samajas or communities.[64] Gopikanta Roy was an important person among Barendra Kayasthas because he was believed to be a descendant of Bhrigu Nandy who was hailed by the kulajis as one of the leaders of this community at the time of Ballala Sena. The kulajigranthas also indicate quite clearly that Gopikanta Roy's power and status rose higher after he was appointed to the office of qanungo by Raja Man Singh. Gopikanta Roy then took a number of steps which clearly illustrate that political and professional elevation bore a close relationship to influence and sway within the jati/kula-based samaja. Gopikanta Roy was apparently married into a family which did not belong to the Barendra Kayastha community and thus broke the current marriage 'laws' in his samaja. Gopikanta is also supposed to have taken the unusual step of insisting that his father-in-law should be accepted into the Barendra Kayastha community and regarded as belonging to the Chaki lineage which enjoyed great respect within that samaja. Gopikanta's power and status was able to secure the end he had in mind.[65] There are other instances of this phenomenon. Lakshmikanta Majumdar and Maharaja Krishnachandra Roy were powerful chieftains who belonged to the Rarhiya Brahmin community

and held dominant positions within it in their own localities during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively. Both supported certain marriage practices for their own families which would normally not pass muster among Rarhiya Brahmins of the time. But both Lakshmikanta and Maharaja Krishnachandra Roy were able to push through such practices on account of their status as eminently powerful chieftains of their time.[66]

Actually both the great 'reform' programmes, initiated by Udayanacharya Bhaduri and Debibar Ghatak, referred to above contained within them the implicit recognition of the great material power of rajas and zamindars who were also, in most cases important personages within their own jati/kula-based communities. This is revealed specifically by the provision for the expiation of taints incurred theoretically through improper social interaction in the reforms of Udayancharya Bhaduri. These features actually appear more comprehensible when located in the wider context of the milieu ushered in by the reign of Raja Ganesha. The accession of this king and his son is believed to have witnessed a great ascendancy of high-status Hindus—particularly Kayasthas, but also Barendra Brahmins—in terms of their association with important bureaucratic offices. In the discourse of the kulajis, the downside to this situation was constituted by the fact that many of these highly placed Barendra Brahmins and Kayasthas began to assume customs and manners associated with Muslim elites and there occurred a degree of perhaps inevitable social/physical proximity and contact among them. Yet, the provision for the expiation of taints suggests that the norms of social conduct laid down by the kulagurus could not actually be enforced. As Nagendranath Basu rightly points out, many among the Barendra Brahmin community had acquired so much wealth and power that the kulacharyas (who were ultimately dependent on influential persons within the community) could not actually expel them forever on account of transgressive behaviour. The only recourse for leaders like Udayanacharya Bhaduri was to acknowledge and record the types of transgressions in the kulajis which functioned as the archives of the community's social behaviour. The provision for the expiation of the abasads in particular might suggest that these transgressions had been committed by especially powerful people and, in practical terms, it was not in the interest of the jati/kula-based community or the kulaguru to associate them with this taint forever. In the specific cases of the Mathurkopa abasad and the Darpanarayani

abasad, people belonging to eminent families pleaded with those who commanded great respect within the community—such as kulinas and kulacharyas for the removal of the problem.[67] The provision of specific steps which could free the transgressor from the taint, served to relieve individuals and the lineage which had strayed from the norms within the group, and also underscored the power, importance, and relevance of the kualcharyas. A similar feature was inherent in the mel bandhan initiative associated with Debibar Ghatak for Rarhiya Brahmins. Debibar's mel scheme recognized instances of transgressive behaviour but it neither expelled such transgressors from the community, nor demoted them from kulina status. This was especially true of powerful individuals and lineages.

The discussion above raises the question of how the conceptual and theoretical paradigms within which the kulashastra of medieval Bengal was situated, handled this nexus between material status and jati/kula-based status. According to the theoretical underpinnings of Brahmanism, status usually brought with it material entitlements and rewards, but this was not what actually defined status. The stark dichotomy of material power and spiritual status postulated by Louis Dumont as the hallmark of the caste system[68] has been disputed by others,[69] and the examples given above support the position of those who opposed Dumont. The genealogies of practically all high-status jatis in Bengal bear testimony to the fact that material success gained through means not approved by the norms of jati/kula conduct were nevertheless proudly recorded and commemorated for posterity. In these chronicles, the fundamental principles of Brahminism were neither openly flouted nor scorned (in fact, quite the reverse). In effect, the two kinds of power (material power and status-based power) existed in tandem and reaffirmed one another. The kulagranthas quite clearly reveal that the maintenance of Brahminical principles and particularly their application to social issues was enabled by collaboration among three important entities, that is, the king, the kulacharya, and the community or the samaja. The king, however, functioned as the linchpin that made possible the functioning of a jati/kula-based order whose concerns were articulated in the kulajis. An analysis of the relations among these three entities sheds valuable light on the links that connected the community or the samaja to the political and normative authority of the raja. However, a digression into it is somewhat beyond the scope of this chapter.[70]

The Authority, Legitimacy, and Historicity of the Kulagranathas

The kulagranthas discussed in this chapter embodied a long-lived genre of chronicle literature—often without clearly assigned authors and dates. Yet, they were sung, recited, compiled, and recast over centuries. The hierarchies of jatis and kulas maintained in them could and did produce very real consequences in the lives of families and clans over an extended period of time. From where did these materials draw their legitimacy and authority? The authority and legitimacy of the kulagrantha tradition came from its antiquity and its repeated tellings and re-tellings over the centuries. Through the continuous repetition of these materials, they themselves became synonymous with a regional Brahminical tradition. The authority of the kulagranthas derived equally from the fact that they were associated with the leaders of the jati/kula-based samaja, that is, the rajas who were also often *samajapati*s (leader of the samaja in social matters), and particularly the kulacharyas who composed and preserved the kulagranthas. Authority and legitimacy thus were rooted in the status and prestige of those who buttressed the samaja. As noted above, the kulajis were sung or recited at public occasions. The collective, communal nature of its dissemination at public occasions such as weddings could also imply the assent of the audience who gathered to listen to it.

The chronicle form of the kulagranthas also possessed significant implications for temporal conceptions and assumptions. At their most explicit and transparent level, these chronicles, while recording the creation of dense webs of marriage relationships within a jati, also commemorated biological descent within the lineage. As Gabrielle Spiegel argues, the annal or chronicle form performed critically important functions in pre-modern societies in terms of creating and reinforcing a sense of continuity and linear temporality.[71] Genealogies also asserted the temporal durability of their subjects, whether a family or a ruling dynasty, and allowed perceived relationships between historical figures and events of the past and present to be viewed as one continuous stream of happening. Most importantly perhaps, chronicles provided a 'perceptual grid'[72] within which to arrange, organize, and present the past. As seen here, this perceptual grid took the form of discrete biographies of kings or heads of kulina lineages linked together through generational change which was manifest through descent and succession. Genealogies, furthermore, connected the past and the

present by grounding it in biology and since they suggested that the human process of filiation and procreation were metaphors for historical change, they also served to secularize the notion of time.[73]

Above all, the kulagranthas functioned as a collective archive of social memory and communal history. These materials strengthened and perpetuated a collective sense of jati-based Brahminical identity as well as a communal sense of its origin and development over time. Medieval Bengali literature is replete with examples of the prevalence and ubiquitousness of such jati-based collective identities. Writing at the very end of the eighteenth century, when the relevance of the world depicted in the kulagranthas was probably already much weaker than before, the polyglot Ramram Basu, the munshi of various Englishmen and the author of *Maharaja Pratapaditya Charitra* introduced himself as a Bangaja Kayastha and a *sva-jati* (same jati) of the subject of his biography.[74] As the discussion in this chapter establishes, these genealogies created a narrative about the origin and evolution of Brahminical society in Bengal through the detailed records of marriage practices and social interactions of high-status jatis and kulas. This chronicle literature made strategic and necessary acknowledgements of professional and socio-cultural interactions between high profile kulina lineages and various Muslim ruling powers who governed Bengal from the twelfth century onwards. However, its basic concern about enforcing norms of behaviour within the Brahminical samaja remained undisturbed. By identifying the various 'others' of Brahminism, the kulajis also sought to form a sense of Brahminical social identity and community which was located in opposition to the deviant 'others'. Thus they produced a reservoir of collective social memory regarding the origin and growth of Bengal's Brahminical samaja. As Fentress and Wickham remark, 'how does one make individual memory "social"?...essentially by talking about it. The sorts of memories one shares with others are those which are relevant to them, in the context of a social group of a particular kind'.[75] The claim of Bengal's genealogical tradition to be regarded as social memory or history is borne out by the fact that the fundamental reason for their creation and preservation lay in the recognized need to transmit them as widely as possible. At least in the period before the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, these chronicles were not materials whose primary utility lay in being stored carefully in personal libraries—they were primarily intended for dissemination. The use of rhyming verse and fairly rustic, unsophisticated type of vernacular underscores the perceived urgency to spread the message contained in

the kulajis as widely as possible. I make no claim for the historicity of the kulajis in the late nineteenth century, rational-positivist sense of it. But I do believe that the kulajis came very close to what itihasa was expected to accomplish, that is, give people a sense of the past for the purpose of edification, entertainment, and instruction.

Notes

1. The genealogies/kulajis used in this chapter include some Sanskrit materials, for example, the manuscript entitled, 'Rajabali' (Dhaka University Library, mss. no. K577A) and W. Pertsch (ed. and tr.) *Kshitishvamsavalicharitam. A Chronicle of the Family of Raja Krishnachandra of Navadvipa* in Mohit Roy (ed.), *Kshitishvamsavalicharit,* Calcutta, 1986; also Bengali kulajis which were edited and translated during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for example, Kedarnath Datta, *Datta Vamshavali*, 1282 BS, Calcutta; Mahimachandra Guha-Tahkurta, *Kayastha Kulachandrika*, Barisal, 1912. I have also used kulajis excerpted/ reproduced in Nagendranath Basu's *Banger Jatiya Itihasa*, many vols, 1318–40 BS, Calcutta; Lalmohan Bidyanidhi, *Sambandha Nirnaya,* 5 vols, 1355 BS, Calcutta and Umeshchandra Gupta, *Jati Tattva Baridhi*, 2 vols, Calcutta, 1905 and 1912, respectively.

2. Nagendranath Basu, *Banger Jatiya Itihasa: Brahminkanda,*1318 BS, Calcutta; Ronald B. Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture*, Berkeley, 1976.

3. Nagendranath Basu, *Brahminkanda, Rajanyakanda,* 1321 BS, Calcutta; *Barendra Brahmin Bibaran*, 1334 BS, Calcutta; *Barendra Kayastha Bibaran,* 1334 BS, Calcutta; *Uttar Rarhiya Kayastha Kanda,* 1335 BS, Calcutta; *Dakshin Rarhiya Kayastha Kanda*, 1340 BS, Calcutta; Gupta, *Jati Tattva Baridhi*, 2 vols.

4. Ibid.

5. 'acaharo, vinayo vidya pratishtha tirtha darshanam/britti, tapo, danam navadha kula-lakshanam', quoted from Bachaspati Mishra's *Kularama* in Basu, *Brahminkanda*, p. 134.

6. See note 3 above.

7. Basu, *Brahminkanda*, *Rajanyakanda*.

8 Ibid. *Brahminkanda, Rajanyakanda* and *Dakshin Rarhiya Kayastha Kanda.*

9. Basu, *Barendra Kayastha Bibaran,* preface, and pp. 2, 5, and 43–4, *Uttar Rarhiya Kayastha Kanda.*

10. The use of Sanskrit in kulajis is attested to by genealogies such as the 'Rajabali' manuscript no. K577A of the Dhaka University Library, W. Pertsch (ed.), *Kshitishvamsavalicharitam. A Chronicle of the Family of Raja Krishnachandra of Navadvipa,* in Mohit Roy (ed.)*Kshitishvamsavalicharit,* 1986, Calcutta. The use of Bengali is attested to by many kulajis published in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for example, the bulk of kulajis excerpted in the many vols of Basu's *Banger Jatiya Itihasa* and in the 2 vols of Gupta's *Jati Tattva Baridhi.*

11. For discussions of the culturally prestigious character of Sanskrit, see Sheldon Pollock, 'The Sanskrit Cosmopolis, AD 300–1300: Transculturation, Vernacularization, and the Question of Ideology', in J.E.M. Houben (ed.), *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit. Contributions to the History of the Sanskrit Language*, Leiden, 1996, pp. 197–248 and 'Sanskrit Literary Culture from the Inside Out', pp. 39–130 in Sheldon Pollock (ed.), *Literary Cultures in History: Reconstructions From South Asia*, Berkeley, 2003.

12. For a general idea of conditions prevailing in a manuscript culture, see M.T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Records, England: 1066–1307,*1979, Cambridge, Mass., 1979.

13. Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory and Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews,* in D.F. Bouchard (ed.), Ithaca, 1977, pp. 113–38.

14. R.C. Majumdar, 'Samskrita Rajabali Grantha', in *Sahitya Parishat Patrika*, vol. 4, 1346 BS, Calcutta, pp. 233–9.

15. Romila Thapar, 'Genealogy as a Source of Social History', in Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations,* Delhi, 1979, pp. 326–60.

16. Ibid.

17. R.C. Majumdar, *Bangiya Kulashastra*, Calcutta, 1979.

18. See note 3 above.

19. For a discussion of the relationship among these entities, see K. Chatterjee, 'Communities, Kings and Chronicles: The Kulagranthas of Bengal', *Studies in History*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2005, pp. 173–213.

20. Basu, *Brahminkanda.*

21. Ibid.

22. Kunal Chakrabarty, *Religious Process. The Puranas and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, New Delhi, 2001.

23. R.C. Hazra, *Studies in the Upapuranas* 2 vols, Calcutta, 1958, 1963, Sureshchandra Bandyopadhyaya, *Smriti Shastre Bangali*, 1961, Calcutta.

24. W. Pertsch, *Kshitishvamsavalicharitam.*

25. Basu, *Barendra Brahmin Bibaran*, pp. 24–8. *Rajanyakanda*. pp. 324–30, *Uttar Rarhiya Kayastha Kanda*, pp. 35–43, *Barendra Kayastha Bibaran*, pp. 87–93.

26. Basu, *Barendra Brahmin Bibaran*, pp. 25–6, 28.

27. Basu, *Rajanyakanda*, pp. 325–6.

28. Ibid.

29. Ibid., p. 326.

30. Ibid.

31. Ramakanta Chakrabarti, *Bange Baishnab Dharma.*

32. Anandabhatta, *Ballalacharita,* in Haraprasad Shastri (ed. and tr.), Calcutta, 1904.

33. Basu, *Rajanyakanda*, pp. 325–6; *Barendra Kayastha Bibaran*. pp. 88–93.

34. Basu, *Barendra Kayastha Bibaran*, pp. 88–93; *Rajanyakanda*, pp. 325–6.

35. Basu, *Uttar Rarhiya Kayastha Kanda*, pp. 31–5; *Barendra Kayastha Bibaran*, pp. 88–93, *Rajanyakanda*, pp. 325–8; *Barendra Brahmin Bibaran*, pp. 25–8.

36. Basu, *Barendra Kayastha Bibaran.*

37. This process has been discussed in greater details for both the sultanate and Mughal periods in chapters 1 and 7.

38. Sir Jadunath Sarkar (ed.), *History of Bengal. Muslim Period 1200–1757,* Patna, 1973 (rpt); Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier 1204–1760,* Delhi, 1994.

39. R.C. Majumdar, *Bangiya Kulashastra*; M.R. Tarafdar, 'Kulaji Sahityer Aitihasikata', in *Itihasa o Aitihasika*, Dhaka, 1989.

40. Sukhamoy Mukhopadhyaya and Sumangal Rana (eds), *Jayananda Birachita Chaitanyamangala*, p. 135.

41. Cited by Basu, *Brahminkanda*, footnote 4, pp. 187–8.

42. Ibid.

43. Basu, *Barendra Brahmin Bibaran*, p. 48.

44. Ibid., pp. 58–95.

45. Ibid., pp. 58–65.

46. Ibid., pp. 68–9.

47. Ibid., pp. 70–5.

48. Ibid., p. 69.

49. Ibid.

50. Ibid., p. 189.

51. See also Tarafdar, 'Kulaji Sahityer Aitihasikata', pp. 121–2.

52. Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Bengal under Akbar and Jehangir*, p. 114.

53. Basu, *Brahminkanda*, p. 186.

54. Ibid., pp. 186–95.

55. Ibid., pp. 217–19; Tarafdar, 'Kulaji Sahityer Aitihasikata', p. 122.

56. Basu, *Brahminkanda*, pp. 187–8, 195–6, 201–14.

57. Ibid., p. 227

58. Basu, *Barendra Kayastha Bibaran*, pp. 119–120.

59. Ibid., p. 121.

60. Ibid., p. 153, footnote 9.

61. Ibid., pp. 160–4.

62. Pertsch, *Kshitish*, p. 243.

63. Durgachandra Sanyal, *Banger Samajika Itihasa*, 1317 BS, Calcutta.

64. The kulajis often used honorific titles—such as nawab—of Muslim kings or their nobles and did not always refer to them by name, thus making it difficult to identify them.

65. N. Basu, *Barendra Kayastha Bibaran,* p. 148

66. N. Basu, *Brahminkanda*, pp. 247, 276–7; A.K. Roy, *Lakshmikanta: A Chapter in the Social History of Bengal,* pp. 28–9.

67. Basu, *Barendra Brahmin Bibaran*, pp. 79, 90–95.

68. Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste System and its Implications*, (trs), M. Sainsbury et al., Chicago, 1980.

69. For example, Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*, Cambridge, 1987.

70. For a discussion of the relationship among the raja, samaja, and kulacharya and its significance for an understanding of the society and culture of medieval and early modern Bengal, see K. Chatterjee, 'Communities, Kings and Chronicles: the Kulagranthas of Bengal', pp. 174–213. For a discussion of the nature of community, see Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton, 1993, pp. 220–39.

71. Gabrielle Spiegel, 'Genealogy, Form and Function in Medieval Historiography', in *The Past as Text*, Baltimore, 1997, pp. 99–109.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid.; also, Spiegel, *Romancing the Past. The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth Century France*, Berkeley, 1993.

74. Ramram Basu, *Raja Pratapaditya Charitra*, Searampore, 1801.

75. J. Fentress and C. Wickham (eds), *Social Memory*, 1992, Oxford, pp. ix–x.

3

Performance Narratives and the Mughal Factor

Like most pre-modern societies, Bengal too produced a large literature that was mostly performative. These narratives, written in rhyming verse, had a textual dimension but they were written for performance and were most commonly enjoyed as such. The most general term used to describe these verse narratives is *panchali sahitya*. Sukumar Sen defines 'panchali' as 'stories (*akhyayika*) that were meant to be sung or narrated'.[1] By Sen's definition, many branches of Bengali literature of the medieval period—such as the Ramayanas and Mahabharatas, the many compositions focused on stories about Krishna as well as the Mangalkavyas—would all fit under the overarching rubric of panchali sahitya.[2] According to Sen, Mangalkavyas were panchalis that centred on the story of a particular deity and often had terms like *mangala* (auspicious), and sometimes terms like *vijaya* (victory), associated with them. These panchali narratives, according to Sen, were probably initially associated with rituals designed to ensure the well-being of the home and the family. Therefore, there existed a connection between Mangalkavyas and other types of panchalis and *vratas* or rituals usually associated with women and performed for the purpose of securing domestic bliss and happiness.[3] Ashutosh Bhattacharya posits a set of much sharper distinctions between vratas and Mangalkavyas. According to him the most important distinction lay in the fact that a vrata was a kind of religious ritual which had to be necessarily accompanied by the recitation of a narrative—called *vratakatha*—which detailed the exploits of the particular deity being honoured. The Mangalkavyas, by contrast, were often performed at religious ceremonies but they were not an essential part of it.[4] I

prefer to use Sen's description of panchalis as a broader category of performative literature based on stories which incorporated within them the Mangalkavyas, the Ramayana, the narratives about the exploits of Krishna, as well as narratives about the miraculous exploits of Muslim pirs and *ghazis*, often called *Ghazimangala*. A strong reason for accepting Sen's definition derives from the fact that medieval composers often used terms like 'mangala', '*vratageet*', 'panchali', and the like interchangeably and synonymously for each other.[5] As regards the religious significance of the Mangalkavyas, it may indeed be true, that these narratives, in the strictest and narrowest sense, did not comprise essential aspects of religious rituals. However, they ended up being revered and respected almost like religious artefacts. Their association with the exploits of gods and goddesses caused the texts of these kavyas to be regarded with such reverence and awe that they were practically worshipped together with deities in a household or even in public shrines.[6]

Genealogy and other Features of the Mangalkavyas

The Mangalkavyas can be located within a range of vernacular Puranas (like the South Indian *Sthalapuranas*) which had descended lineally from the Sanskrit Upa-puranas. Like the Puranas, the Mangalkavyas too aimed at glorifying particular deities. The Puranas, as we have seen in Chapter 1, were supposed to be recognizable by their panchalakshana. Some of these features crept into the Mangalkavyas too.[7] However, it would be inaccurate to regard the Mangalkavyas as vernacular replicas of the Puranas. The Puranic inspiration and antecedents of the Mangalkavyas are undoubted; but these narratives also represent creative, vernacular mediations of the Puranic tradition. The Mangalkavyas combined their focus on the worship of certain deities with a strong emphasis on the many human characters who peopled their stories. It is with respect to this feature that they differed from the classic Puranas.

The remarkable longevity of the Mangalkavyas as a genre is attested to by the fact that they were composed continuously from the fifteenth till the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Mangalkavyas written in honour of the deities Manasa (the snake goddess), Chandi (the patron deity of forests and animals, later metamorphosed into the Brahminical Durga, the consort of Shiva) were all composed through this period. Another large cluster of Mangalkavyas centred on the worship of Dharma Thakur emerged in the Rarh region of Bengal during the

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Mangalkavyas about Shiva had also been composed in different parts of Bengal during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, while lower Bengal became the stage for the production of Mangalkavyas celebrating hitherto lesser-known deities such as Dakshin Roy (the tiger god), the pir Bada Khan Ghazi (also a protector from tiger attacks), Shashthi (the protector of small children), Shitala (the goddess who protected against small pox), and others.[8] Specific Mangalkavyas, such as Mukunda Chakrabarty's *Chandimangala* and Bharatchandra Roy's *Annadamangala* acquired the status of literary landmarks in the history of Bengali literature.

Mangalkavya narratives can be located in the need perceived by the region's Brahminism to establish connections with the multiple forms of worship and practice prevalent among the region's humble and lowly people who had not been fully Brahminized.[9] Thus, at one level, the Mangalkavya tradition reflects the gradual Brahminization of many folk deities around whom these kavyas were produced. The goddess Chandi of the Kalketu story of the sixteenth century *Chandimangala* of Mukunda Chakrabarty for instance, is closer to the autochthonous Chandi of Bengal, that is, she is associated with forests and wild animals, and is depicted as a single woman. These attributes of Chandi are hardly visible in the *Annadamangala* of Bharatchandra Roy written in the middle of the eighteenth century. Ashutosh Bhattacharya points out that the earliest Mangalkavyas do not contain many traces of Sanskritic influence, whereas some of the seventeenth and eighteenth century Mangalkavyas had moved away some what from folk-literary traditions and become more sophisticated and refined.[10] This comment is true to a certain extent, and some later Mangalkavyas—such as the *Annadamangala* for instance—do embody greater refinement. However, I prefer to think that the Mangalkavya tradition in its entirety never really moved away totally from its more proletarian cultural orientation. This is attested to by several *Dharmamangala* texts of the eighteenth century as well as by narratives about the tiger god Dakshin Roy composed by the poet Krishnaram Das for example.[11] Actually, what was remarkable about the Mangalkavya tradition was its ability to function in elite as well as more proletarian milieus.

The Performance-Dimension of the Mangalkavyas

The Mangalkavyas consisted of stories which were set to music and sung and, perhaps in some cases, narrated to an audience. These kavyas also

probably represent a later written form of an earlier oral tradition which had circulated among ordinary people in Bengal. However, despite the emergence of a written textual tradition around the Mangalkavyas from about the later fifteenth century, the oral and performative nature of this literature was neither weakened nor eroded until well into the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[12] In fact, the performative dimension of the Mangalkavyas explains its remarkable durability, malleability, and its potential as a site where urgent and new social and political concerns could be legitimized. The stories that comprised Mangalkavyas were generally sung to audiences—often over several days and nights—by troupes of singers and musicians and a variety of melodies (ragas) were used for the purpose. The rhyming verses found almost universally in the Mangalkavyas were probably used because they were more appealing to an audience.[13] Occasionally, painted scrolls or *pat*s were used during such performances.[14]

It is impossible to document when exactly the Mangalkavyas began to be textualized. The earliest extant texts that have been found so far cannot be dated earlier than the later fifteenth century. Indeed, the Mangalkavyas comprise an excellent example (to borrow a phrase from Goody) of the interface between written and oral traditions.[15] Thus, Mangalkavya writers occasionally described their compositions as *prabandha*s (essay/composition) and sometimes as *geet* (song). Furthermore, the need to categorize them as either oral/folk or written/elite is rendered irrelevant by the fact that they simultaneously fit both pairs of conditions.

Mangalkavya texts have often been found in libraries of aristocratic, affluent, literate, and genteel families. This suggests that these texts were not just performed, but were also read—albeit by a smaller number of people. They were also found in the possession of singers (*gayens*) who performed these stories, sometimes in shrines and ritual centres associated with the particular deity whose glory was celebrated by a specific kavya. These Mangalkavya texts have been typically discovered in the same area or close to the area where the poem was originally composed.[16] This suggests that the reputation and circulation of these works was usually restricted to a relatively small radius around the place where it was written—not an unusual feature in an age when printing was unknown and transportation fairly rudimentary.[17] Those which attained extraordinary fame, such as 'Kabikankan', Mukunda Chakrabarty's rendition of the *Chandimangala*, or Bharatchandra Roy's *Annadamangala*, were of course known more widely throughout many

other regions of Bengal. The orality of these works made them extremely potent and valuable as a means of communication in a pre-print society. The Mangalkavyas could be 'consumed' by a larger audience and were not restricted by considerations of literacy.

Despite the point made above about the relatively limited regional circulation of most Mangalkavyas, there were cases where the dissemination process was amazingly fast. An excellent illustration of this point is provided by a narrative called the *Madanmohanbandana*,[18] which was produced in the kingdom of Bishnupur probably just before 1751. This narrative, which was known to have been sung by Vaishnava singers, told the story of how Lord Madanmohan (that is, Krishna) had rescued the kingdom of Bishnupur from being plundered by the Maratha Bargis whose depredations ravaged Bengal for several years during the 1740s. It is remarkable that Gangaram, the author of the *Maharashtapurana*, referred to this incident in his work which was composed within a short time after the *Madanmohanbandana*. Groups of Vaishnava singers could have facilitated the speedy dissemination of the story and thus, within a few months perhaps of the miraculous incident described in the *Madanmohanbandana*, Gangaram came to hear of it and reported it in his own verse-narrative.

The Social Context of the Mangalkavyas

The social backgrounds of those who composed, patronized, read, and listened to Mangalkavyas indicates the versatility of this narrative genre in terms of its ability to appeal to both ordinary people as well as to the elites. The writing of Mangalkavyas was associated with social groups which were literate or had fairly high levels of education. Thus Brahmins, Kayasthas, and Baidyas figured heavily among composers of Mangalkavyas. Many of the Brahmin poets, in particular, described a curriculum of Brahminical instruction involving the study of *vyakaran*, *abhidhan*, *nyaya*, and alamkara shastra, and the like.[19] By contrast, authors from non-Brahmin, but literate genteel backgrounds—mostly Baidyas and Kayasthas (for example, Narasimha Basu, author of a Dharmamangala narrative)—described a course of education involving the study of Bengali, Persian, Nagri, and Oriya as befitting a group from which professional scribes and bureaucrats were recruited by various ruling regimes in Bengal.[20] There are also examples of Mangalkavya authors who belonged to relatively low status social and ritual groups which were typically not associated with literacy and education, for

example, Tanti (weaver), Kaibarata, Jogi, Shundi, and others.[21] Writers of Mangalkavyas sometimes doubled up as singers of these stories—and this included artiste-writers of high social and ritual status, particularly if they were in economically straitened circumstances.[22] But there were also persons who were associated with Mangalkavyas purely in the capacity of singers.[23]

Mangalkavya performances—as proven by their durability over many centuries—were extremely popular among ordinary people as well as (depending on the venue of the performance) high-status elites. Despite a noticeable trend towards Brahminization/Sanskritization, many of the deities about whom these narratives were written were still popular among ordinary people. The priests or *sebayet*s of sacred spots associated with Dharma Thakur were not invariably Brahmins, but also included people of much lower castes such as Shundis and Doms. It has been suggested that the cult which developed around the snake goddess Manasa sank lower and lower down the social scale over the centuries, until it was associated with the most marginal groups of people. Deities whose worship crystallized around the later eighteenth century such as Dakhsin Roy, Bada Khan Ghazi, Kalu Roy (the crocodile god), and others were very obviously associated with poor marginalized people who inhabited the forested and swampy areas of lower deltaic Bengal. The poet Krishnaram Das, author of a *Roymangala*, referred to the tiger god Dakhsin Roy being worshipped by *moulya*s (collectors of honey) and *malangi*s (salt manufacturers).[24] Mangalkavya performances were also, however, staged in the courts and mansions of aristocrats. The *Annadamangalkavya* was first staged, for instance, at the court of Maharaja Krishnachandra Roy of Nadia.[25] Here the audience included kinsmen, friends, and associates of the raja who were, like Krishnachandra, upper-caste, upper-class Hindus of elite status.[26] But it is more than likely that some ordinary subjects of the raja were also present in the audience during this performance of the *Annadamangala*.

Apart from the fact that these performances were enjoyed as entertainment, the popularity of many of the cults around which the Mangalkavyas were written made it politically expedient and culturally desirable for locally powerful people to be seen as patrons of such productions. Such support which established a connection between local elites and certain locally or regionally popular deities reinforced the social and cultural bases of the political and material power of these elites. Mangalkavyas also served as useful vehicles for

glorifying and extolling the lineage histories of local notables.[27] The widespread popularity of the Mangalkavya genre is manifest in the fact that other types of literature—for example, biographies of Vaishnava leaders such as the *Chaitanyamangala* of Jayananda—came to have the suffix 'mangala' attached to them. By the eighteenth century, the label 'mangala' was being used even for travel narratives. Bijoyram Sen Bisharad's *Tirthamangala* is a case in point.[28]

It was customary for the authors of Mangalkavyas to map out, at the outset of their compositions, the parameters of their own world as perceived by them. Poets thus invoked the names of their ancestors, parents, siblings, spouses, children, and friends in an attempt to 'situate' their personal selves within a web of family, lineage, and village-based relationships. In most pre-modern Bengali literature, structures of political and social authority seem to almost naturally intermesh with the lines delineating a village or region. Thus, names of local-landed magnates, names of their officials, and others appear frequently, almost as signifiers, in this landscape. It is not easy to determine whether local elites were being referred to as part of poetic convention or whether references to them suggest that direct support was provided by these local lords to poets, writers, and Mangalkavya performers living within their jurisdiction. Both scenarios are actually plausible.[29] References by Mangalkavya authors to their families, acquaintances, and patrons served another important purpose: they functioned as strategies for establishing the personal credibility and respectability of the author and, implicitly, the reasons why the narrative should be accepted by the audience.

The Functions of Mangalkavyas

An exploration of the terms used in Mangalkavyas to denote these works, allows us to focus on their perceived and potential functions. The term 'mangala' which recurred in the titles of these works referred to the happiness or prosperity which was believed to accrue to those who heard, composed, performed, or supported them. A range of other terminology was also deployed to describe them. One set of such terms, that is, geet, *gatha*, panchali, and kirtan, referred to the oral and performative aspect of these literary productions. All these terms generally denoted material which was sung or recited—panchali and kirtan more specifically denoted the connection of these materials with the act of describing the actions of gods, goddesses, and other

superhumanor semi-divine beings. Another set of terms used frequently to describe the Mangalkavyas, that is, itihasa, purana, katha, and vrata, point to the content and, more pointedly perhaps, to the function of these materials. These terms were sometimes used synonymously for each other. Such usage is noticeable, for example, in the *Dharmamangala* composed by Jadunath or Jadabram Nath in the last decade of the seventeenth century, in the *Dharmapurana* or *Anadimangala* composed by Kabiratna, and in the *Dharmamangala* of Dwija Ramchandra who completed his work around 1732–3. Kabiratna used the terms 'panchali', 'itihasa', and 'purana' interchangeably for one another.[30] Bharatchandra Roy, at the termination of the second part (that is, the Bidya-Sundar episode) of his magnum opus, the *Annadamangala*, described it both as a 'katha' as well as a work of 'itihasa'.[31]

The interchangeability of these terms seems to indicate that to the various groups of people involved in composing, listening, and patronizing these works, the strict semantic distinctions among the deployed terms mattered very little. Secondly, the fact that the Mangalkavyas did not attempt to define and elucidate the meanings of these words for their audiences and readers also suggests that in Bengal, by the later seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, these terms enjoyed a fair amount of currency and that, in general, people understood what they meant.

Can the Mangalkavyas then be regarded as history? The principal reason for the composition of the Mangalkavyas was extolling the power and greatness of various deities. They were not intended primarily to be factual accounts of past events. However, as attested to by practically all existing scholarship about the Mangalkavyas, these narratives, in addition to functioning as *mahatmya*s of specific deities, also mirror various important processes—political, economic, cultural, and social—which were current during the time periods when specific Mangalkavya narratives were composed. One of the early *Dharmamangala*s provides a glimpse of how some worshippers of Dharma Thakur may have rationalized the Turkish invasion of Bengal.[32] In Sukumar Sen's view, the *Mangal Chandir Geet*, composed by Dwija Madhab (Madhabacharya) might reflect the terror produced in Bengal by the violence that accompanied the military efforts of the Mughal state to establish its political and military control over the region.[33] Mukunda Chakrabarty's graphic description of forest clearance[34] could well mirror such a process occurring in the western Rarh region of Bengal which continued to be a forested area, well beyond the time of this poet.

Sometimes, autobiographical and other allusions and references in them serve as pointers towards other contemporary phenomena.[35]

However, 'embedded' (in the sense in which Romila Thapar uses this term) in certain Mangalkavyas are segments—such as the ones discussed in subsequent sections of this chapter—which provide a narration of sequential events together with a clear-sighted recognition of the causal factors underlying them. These were accompanied by a broad interpretive framework which most often conveyed the explicit and implicit point of view held by the author of the narrative. Such episodes in the Mangalkavyas sometimes also functioned as clear acts of remembrance in which the past was deliberately used to invoke some statements or points about the present. It is mostly in such portions of the Mangalkavyas that their historical elements are most apparent.

The Mangalkavyas thus represented a many-faceted tradition. Their performative aspect associated them with the value and function of entertainment; at the same time they held the attention and interest of society by presenting tales of heroes and gods. They also purported to be memories of bygone times. In the 'instruction and advice mode', the Mangalkavyas presented models of ideal behaviour via mortal heroes and heroines.

The following section demonstrates how the popularity and malleability of the Mangalkavyas allowed them to be used as sites on which historically contingent concerns and priorities of the eighteenth century could be negotiated.

Three Mangalkavyas: the *Annadamangala*, the *Maharashtapurana*, and the *Gaurimangala*

This section focuses on two Mangalkavyas which were produced around the middle of the eighteenth century. One of these was the *Maharashtapurana*,[36] composed by Gangaram in 1751–2. The other is the *Annadamangala* of 'Roygunakar' Bharatchandra Roy,[37] often considered to represent the highest pinnacle of achievement to be reached by Bengali literature in the early modern period. It was completed in 1752. The *Annadamangala* was also phenomenally popular. With the advent of print culture in early nineteenth century Bengal, the *Annadamangala* was among the foremost texts to be printed and reprinted several times by the bat-tala press.[38] The *Gaurimangala*, composed by Raja Prithvichandra of Pakur in 1806, is used here primarily for comparative purposes.

The *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana* were composed during the reign of the Nawab Ali Vardi Khan (1740–56) of Bengal. At the time these two narratives were composed, the destructive Bargi invasions had just ended and the financial strains produced by them compelled Nawab Ali Vardi Khan to cease remittance of the annual tribute—a practical manifestation of Bengal's connection to the Mughal empire—to his overlord in Delhi. The *Gaurimangala,* which serves as a point of contrast to the other two, was composed a few decades later. Yet, a virtual sea change had occurred in the political landscape of Bengal during this period. By the time this narrative was composed, the rule of the Murshidabad nawabs had been replaced by the English East India Company's State. Raja Prithvichandra, the zamindar-poet who authored the *Gaurimangala,* as a member of the region's landed aristocracy probably had to face the effects of the transition to a new and different ruling power by the early years of the nineteenth century. All three narratives fit under the rubric of Chandimangalkavyas; all three were verse narratives; all three demonstrate the ability of old literary genres to retain their generic, formulaic features; in fact, the *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana* underscore their ability to adjust to contingent conditions and to reflect them.

Poets and Patrons

Bharatchandra Roy (titled 'Roygunakar') is well-known as the court poet of Maharaja Krishnachandra Roy of Nadia, one of the most powerful zamindars of eighteenth century Bengal. This narrative had been composed at the command of Bharatchandra's patron, Maharaja Krishnachandra. Bharatchandra himself was the son of a wealthy, landed family whose estates had been located in the pargana of Bhursut in western Bengal. The seizure of his family's estates by the more powerful and expansionist zamindari of Burdwan plunged Bharatchandra and his family into considerable material deprivation and difficulties. Bharatchandra suffered considerable vicissitudes of fortune following this event. His life was characterized by many adventures and dramatic twists and turns, but he managed nevertheless to acquire a distinguished education befitting the son of an aristocratic family. Bharatchandra's poetic output was in many languages: Bengali, Sanskrit, and Brajbhasha. He had also been trained in the Persian language. His adult life and material circumstances eventually reached a degree of stability with the acquisition of the patronage of the raja of Nadia.[39]

Bharatchandra Roy's location in the court of Maharaja Krishnachandra Roy of Nadia is significant since it shaped the content and character of his poetic magnum opus, the *Annadamangalkavya*, in many ways. The rajas of Nadia had attained the status of an important landed family in western Bengal since at least the sixteenth century. According to the genealogy of this family, this Rarhiya Brahmin lineage traced back its origins in formulaic manner to King Adisura and his importation into Bengal of five ritually purer Brahmins from Kanauj in northern India.[40] But, as David Curley points out, intertwined with this account of the family's origin was the parallel account of the family's acquisition of superior revenue collecting rights from the rulers of Delhi.[41] A few generations later, Bhabananda Majumdar of this family secured the office of qanungo from the Mughal subahdar at Dhaka as well as the title of 'Majumdar'. Thanks to a farman from the emperor Jehangir (1605–27), his control over his existing landholdings was confirmed and he was granted revenue rights over fourteen other parganas. This process, initiated by Bhabananda Majumdar, continued through the seventeenth century and this family expanded its estates periodically through farmans from various Mughal emperors. Raja Rudra, the great grandson of Bhabananda Majumdar, was moreover honoured with the title of 'maharaja' by emperor Aurangzeb (1658–1707). Maharaja Krishnachandra Roy of Nadia was the grandson of Raja Rudra and ascended the throne of Nadia in 1728.[42]

The political accession of the Nadia rajas thus coincided with the consolidation of Mughal rule over Bengal and a stricter administration than the relatively easier situation that had prevailed earlier, particularly as far as the landed aristocracy was concerned. Many of the Nadia rajas had to face imprisonment at Dhaka. Raghuram, the father of Maharaja Krishnachandra was also said to have been held prisoner at Dhaka by Murshid Quli Khan for defaulting in the payment of revenue; Krishnachandra himself had to suffer the indignity of imprisonment at the hands of Nawab Ali Vardi Khan in 1740 for being unable to meet the payments demanded of him by the latter.[43] Thus, relations between these rajas and the nawabs of Murshidabad were periodically strained. This issue shaped some of the positions adopted in the poem *Annadamangala* by its author Bharatchandra Roy.

This family of landed aristocrats in Bengal had also acquired the reputation of being one of the foremost champions of Brahminism. This image of the Nadia rajas was certainly at its peak in the eighteenth century during the rule of Maharaja Krishnachandra, but its evolution

can be traced back to the seventeenth century and to the time of Krishnachandra's ancestors. In his role as the champion of Bengal's Brahminism, Krishnachandra was especially known for initiating, or popularizing, the worship of the goddess in many forms.[44] The *Annadamangala*, a eulogy to the goddess Durga or Annada, was thus a direct expression of the goddess-devotion which Maharaja Krishnachandra Roy expressed so publicly during his lifetime.

In contrast to the personal life of Bharatchandra, not much definitive information is available about the poet Gangaram who authored the *Maharashtapurana*. What we have are a few interesting and provocative but disputed suggestions regarding the identity and background of this author.[45] According to the most plausible hypothesis, Gangaram Dev of Dharishwar village in Mymensingh belonged to a fairly well-established family. He was employed as an official by a family of wealthy Muslim zamindars; he rose to become the *naib* of their administrative establishment in a place called Dhaldia and acquired the title of Chowdhury. In his later life, Gangaram composed a few original works called *Shuk Sambad*, *Labkush Charitra*, and the *Maharashtapurana*.[46]

The author of the *Gaurimangala*, Raja Prithvichandra of Pakur or the Ambar raj, as it was also known, was the zamindar of an estate which had been in the possession of his family for many centuries. This Brahmin family's genealogical traditions identified the founder of the family's fortunes in Bengal as a certain Sulakshan Tewary who had acquired a jagir in Pakur and some nearby places from the Mughal emperor. Sulakshan Tewary's grandson, Prithvipal was rewarded and honoured by the Mughal emperor for the assistance he had provided to Raja Man Singh during the latter's tenure in Bengal. Prithvichandra Shahi became raja of the Pakur/Ambar raj in 1791 and held it until his death in 1835. He was a highly educated man, proficient in Bengali, Sanskrit, and Urdu. Deeply religious, he was well-read in the Brahamnical shastras such as the Puranas, and the great epics.[47]

The Thematic and the Generic in the *Annadamangal* and the *Maharashtapurana*

Bharatchandra named his verse narrative *Annadamangala*, thereby signalling his intention to situate his composition in the tradition of Mangalkavya narratives which had enjoyed a long and popular career in Bengal. He also stated that his patron, Maharaja Krishnachnadra Roy had asked him to model his composition on the earlier, well-

known *Chandimangalkavya* of Kabikankan Mukunda Chakrabarty. Besides, Bharatchandra drew upon the already existing Mangalkavya tradition and made pointed intertextual references to characters and events mentioned in the *Manasamangala* and *Chandimangala* kavyas. Most importantly, the *Annadamangalkavya* exhibits many generic and thematic features, which by the eighteenth century had become almost formulaic for Mangalkavya narratives.[48]

The *Annadamangala* extolled the powers of the goddess Annada; it was also a eulogistic lineage-history of the rajas of Nadia. In particular, this narrative functioned as a strategy of remembering the processes—divine as well as secular—that had made possible the effective founding of this family's prosperity and prestige by Bhabananda Majumdar in the seventeenth century. The first segment of the *Annadamangalkavya* (in true Mangalkavya style) focused on the actions and reactions of various gods and goddesses culminating in Bhabananda Majumdar, actually a son of Kubera, the god of wealth, being born on earth as a mortal in order to atone for a minor sin he had committed in heaven.[49] The second part of the *Annadamangala* turns to an account of the exploits of Raja Man Singh in Bengal. The lengthy romance of Bidya and Sundar (which became the most popular segment of the poem) forms part of the story of Man Singh's activities in Bengal. Stripped off the Bidya-Sundar romance, this part of the *Annadamangala* focuses purely on political developments of the seventeenth century as they affected Bhabananda Majumdar.[50] The final segment of the kavya recounted the circumstances of Bhabananda's journey to the Mughal court in Delhi and his subsequent triumph there.[51] Bharatchandra's narrative has two principal aims: first, he shows how the goddess Annapurna possessed the power to reward and protect those who worshipped her and conversely meted out terrible retribution on those who resisted worshipping her. Secondly, this section of the kavya provides a historical grounding for the story of Annada's victory and the linked story of Bhabananda's material success through a description of actual political developments in seventeenth century Bengal. These developments, also tied the Mughal military-political system with the fortunes of Bhabananda Majumdar, the mortal hero of the poem. In recounting the careers and achievements of Maharaja Krishnachandra Roy's ancestors—particularly, the misfortunes that befell Kashinath Roy and the subsequent restoration of the family's prestige and affluence by Bhabananda—it is not unlikely that Bharatchandra, the author, had consulted the already existing Sanskrit genealogy of this family entitled

the *Kshitishvamsavalicharitam* which had probably been composed in the 1720s on the occasion of the raja's coronation.

Doubts have been voiced as to whether the *Maharashtapurana* of Gangaram should be regarded as a 'proper' Mangalkavya. Dimock and Gupta characterized it as a 'text of pure secular history.'[52] Rao-Shulman-Subrahmanyam point to the fact that in this narrative, human actions are depicted as largely autonomous and less tied to divine manipulation.[53] Undoubtedly, this text displays significant departures from what had come to be seen as the typical formula of Mangalkavya narratives. Actually, for that matter the *Annadamangala* also embodies significant departures from the typical characteristics of Mangalkavyas. These aspects of both texts have been further discussed below. To return to the point at hand, I locate the *Maharashtapurana* within the Mangalkavya tradition because in my view this text also gave singular importance to several features which link it quite firmly to this generic tradition. The Bargi invasions of Bengal constitute the backbone of the *Maharashtapurana*. However, its underpinnings, in the classic formulaic model of the Mangalkavyas were comprised of an account about the power of the goddess Durga and her ability to punish evil doers and reward those who acted in virtue. Gangaram set the groundwork for his tale by first explaining that the Bargi raids which had convulsed mid-eighteenth century Bengal were actually the result of a divine command. The gods used the Maratha Bargis as tools to punish the people of Bengal as well as the nawab of Bengal for their sins. Secondly, he represented it as revenge taken by the Bargis for the non-payment of revenue by the Bengal nawabs to the Mughal emperor.[54] Rao-Shulman-Subrahmanyam point out that this story 'has no heroes'.[55] Indeed, in the course of the narrative, the Bargis change from being the objects of divine command to a cruel, ruthless people who had transgressed the norms of ethical behaviour. In fact, one of the most remarkable features of the *Maharashtapurana* is its vivid description of the horrors perpetrated by the Maratha Bargis in Bengal, that is, the plunder and sack of temples, the rape and assault of women, and such other acts.[56] Just as the Bargis are transformed in the course of the poem from the chosen people of the Gods to common marauders, so the nawab of Bengal is also transformed in the course of the poem. In the latter case, the change, however, is in a positive direction since the nawab metamorphoses from a figure whom the gods decide to punish, to a figure who appears virtuous and restrained in comparison to the Bargis. The nawab of Bengal was able to annihilate Bhaskar, the

leader of the Bargis, and free his kingdom from the Maratha scourge only after the goddess decided to withdraw her blessing and protection from the Bargis and transfer it instead to the nawab. In the words of Gangaram:

When she saw the dire straits of the people Parvati was very angry
Pasupati [Siva] ordered that the sinners [Bargis] should be killed.
[These] evil-minded ones had killed Brahmanas and Vaishnavis
Shankari [the goddess] was also angry and said:
'I cannot countenance such injury to Brahmanas and Vaishnavas...
Hear O Bhairavis, be hostile to Bhaskara; be gracious toward the Nawab'.[57]

Indeed, there are no stable heroic characters here. God and evil thus did not reside permanently in any individual or group of individuals. The actions of people determined whether they were good or evil and made them worthy or unworthy of divine protection and blessings. The success or failure of human endeavour was still ultimately rooted in divine pleasure or displeasure. It would indeed be difficult to accommodate a work such as the *Marashtapurana* within the concept of secular, modern history which emerged in Bengal in the nineteenth century.[58]

One other compelling reason for choosing to locate the *Maharashtapurana* within the Mangalkavya tradition derives from the fact that its author chose to name it 'purana', thus indicating his desire to place it within a vast tradition of other narrative texts in Bengal which were also titled as various 'puranas', sometimes in conjunction with other labels. This point has been explored above; it affirms the influence of the Puranic tradition over Bengali literary productions together with a certain legitimacy, status and popularity with which authors wished to associate their compositions. Thus, in my reading, both the *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana* can be placed within Bengal's Mangalkavya tradition. In both works, generic Puranic features associated with the tradition are in evidence; and the gods play major roles in both kavyas.

The *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana* are not obscure or unknown works. Gangaram's literary production is most often viewed by historians in particular as a contemporary mirror of Bargi depredations in Bengal.[59] The *Annadamangala* is hailed as one of the best-known and popular Mangalkavyas to be ever produced and enjoyed immense popularity.[60] It is also regarded as a typical specimen

of eighteenth century Bengali literature which is characterized, quite often by literary scholars, as imitative of earlier traditions, formulaic, and sometimes also decadent.[61] What has gone unnoticed is that behind the façade of 'tradition' that these texts were very careful to maintain, both the *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana* embodied significant deviations from the established models of Mangalkavyas. Both Bharatchandra and Gangaram sought to position their compositions within the framework of the Mangalkavya tradition and yet, very importantly, these works consciously and deliberately deployed a tried and well-liked genre to stage concerns and issues that were neither timeless, nor entirely universal, but immediately related to the political anxieties of eighteenth century Bengal. The expression of contingent material and political concerns was hardly new or unique within the Mangalkavya tradition. To provide one extremely well-known example: in his well-known composition, dated usually to the sixteenth century, Mukunda Chakrabarty discussed the crisis caused in his village by the depredations and oppressions of a certain *dihidar* named Mahmud Sharif.[62] The gravity of the crisis as perceived by Kabikankan is evident from the fact that it compelled him to uproot himself and his family and flee his ancestral village. In comparison to Mukunda Chakrabarty's *Chandimangalkavya*, the two eighteenth century narratives discussed here, articulated their contingent political, material concerns in a mode and style associated with a Persanized Mughal political culture. Thus, it is not merely the incorporation of local concerns that is siginificant, but rather their encapsulation in terms of a political and administrative culture which had come to be associated with the Mughal empire generally and with Bengal's experience of Mughal rule more specifically. The following section discusses the 'Persianized' features noticeable in the *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana* which represented significant deviations from the formulaic model of the Mangalkavyas.

Transgressing the Genre

Two themes bind both the *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana*: first, the obviously Puranic and secondly the temporal. The political/territorial imagination of both Bharatchandra and Gangaram were bounded by the South Asian subcontinent. In the portrayal of both, this territorial/political unit which provided an important context for their stories, was headed by the Mughal emperor at Delhi, while

below him there prevailed regional powers such as the Marathas and the nawabs of Bengal. Bharatchandra sketched out yet another layer of political power below the regional hegemony of the Bengal nawabs, that is, the zamindars among whom specific references are made to the Raja of Burdwan, Maharaja Pratapaditya of Jessore and, of course his own patron, the Raja of Nadia.[63]

Descriptions of rulers and the relations among them as well as between rulers and subjects is a common theme in Mangalkavya literature. The *Dharmamangalkavyas* refer to relationships among several rulers such as Gaureshwar, Lausen, and others.[64] The *Chandimangala* describes the process by which Kalketu, the poor hunter, became transformed into a king and proceeded to lay the foundations of his kingdom.[65] These are merely two examples out of many which can be presented. However, the important point is that neither of these examples reveals a clear-sighted knowledge and awareness of the subcontinental configuration of political power in the eighteenth century in which the Mughals were positioned at the top of the political hierarchy. The *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana* thus embedded their temporal themes not just in any 'local' concerns, but quite plainly in terms of a Mughal political culture. Both texts also gave central importance to issues of loyalty, dependence, and trust which ultimately underpinned relations between political overlords and their subordinates. These were certainly encased in the universal issues of sin and virtue which ultimately constitute central motifs in both texts. However, what stands out is that these preoccupations find expression via idioms associated with Mughal political and administrative culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In *Maharashtapurana*, the basic circumstances which set into motion all the others was comprised of the allegedly sinful activities of the people of Bengal. In Gangaram's depiction, this induced the gods to dispatch the Bargis there to punish the sinners. At the same time, he provided a beautifully nuanced, material/political explanation of why the Bargi raids occurred. The Maratha leader, identified in the poem as Shahu Raja, wrote a letter to the Mughal emperor complaining that he had not received *chauth* (revenue/tribute) from Bengal. The Mughal emperor agreed that this was a serious breach of political duty, but he felt that, in addition, the nawab of Bengal had committed a more serious political offence: the latter had exhibited total disregard for political loyalty by murdering his master and assuming political power over the region (a reference to the coup staged by Nawab Ali Vardi

Khan in 1740 against Sarfaraz Khan). The Mughal emperor felt that the nawab ought to be chastised for transgressing the norms of political duty and conduct: he ordered the Bargis to invade Bengal. Interestingly enough, Gangaram does not paint the nawab of Bengal as an outright villain. Instead, he shows that from the nawab's perspective, it was not he, but the Bargis and the Mughal emperor who were in the wrong. According to the nawab, the tribute from Bengal had never been paid directly to the Marathas, but went instead to the Mughal emperor. Therefore, the Marathas were violating established custom by coming to Bengal as invaders for the ostensible purpose of exacting this tribute. Secondly, the nawab admitted that the Bengal tribute had not been dispatched to Delhi but, in his view he saw no reason to dispatch it when the Mughal emperor had not yet confirmed his accession to the throne by issuing a *sanad* to that effect. Having sketched out different perspectives on the same issue, Gangaram creates yet another complexity by posing the question of whether the Mughal emperor was under any political obligation to recognize someone who had usurped the throne through an act of political disloyalty.[66] Thus, in the *Maharashtapurana*, different sets of temporal/political perspectives nestle within each other. Ultimately, though, these temporal/political questions are not unconnected to the universal notions of sin and virtue as seen in the ultimate triumph of the nawab.

In the *Annadamangala*, the temporal/political concerns of the poet found maximum articulation in the second section of the poem, in the episode involving Raja Man Singh, Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore, and Bhabananda Majumdar. Here, Bharatchandra provided a fascinating depiction of the interplay of relations among the different levels of the political system—a depiction influenced in all likelihood by relations prevailing among himself, his patron and various powerful potentates at different levels of the political system. He acknowledged that the nawabs of Murshidabad were the rulers of Bengal, but then seemed to ignore them until the very end of the narrative. He pointed out that one of the wrongful acts committed by Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore was to withhold revenue payment to the Mughal emperor[67]—the payment of revenue symbolizing, among other things, the act of submission to a political overlord. Yet, nowhere in the narrative did he state that it was important for the zamindars to offer loyalty to the Bengal nawabs. This almost deliberate effort to downplay the importance of the Bengal nawabs was linked to two separate sets of circumstances. As noted above, relations between the Bengal nawabs and the rajas of Nadia were not

always cordial.[68] It is likely that Bharatchandra's strategy of ignoring the nawabs was in part a response to his patron's cool relations with Murshidabad. Secondly, it is not impossible that Bharatchandra held the nawabs at least indirectly responsible for the loss of his patrimonial estate to the powerful and expansionist zamindari of Burdwan. There is no evidence—either in this narrative, or elsewhere—to suggest that the nawab had tried to curb the strong-arm tactics of the Burdwan zamindars. The loss of these family estates inaugurated the beginning of a very difficult period for Bharatchandra personally. It entailed leaving home and the beginning of a quest for powerful patrons from whom he hoped to secure financial help in order to support himself and his family. The tensions prevailing between the Roy family of Bhursut (Bharatchandra's family) and the Burdwan zamindars once resulted in the poet being imprisoned by powerful officials of the Burdwan raj. Bharatchandra managed to escape and reached Orissa, then under the control of the Marathas. He lived for a while in Cuttack at the court of Shivabhatta, a highly placed Maratha official. Shivabhatta allegedly treated Bharatchandra with kindness and helped him to travel to Puri and live there for some time.[69] It is perhaps not irrelevant that in the *Annadamangala* Bharatchandra depicted the Bargis as a people chosen by Shiva through whom Bengal was to be punished for the sinful actions of its nawab who had plundered the abode of Shiva, that is, the city of Bhubaneshwar. In the end though, Bharatchandra too described—sadly and regretfully—the destruction and suffering caused in Bengal by the Bargi incursions.

The Man Singh–Bhabananda–Mughal emperor (identified here as Jehangir) episode in the second part of the *Annadamangala* represents the climax of the poem both for its Puranic as well as temporal themes. Raja Man Singh was sent to Bengal to vanquish the recalcitrant Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore[70]—he was unable to achieve success until he became a worshipper of the goddess. But, the goddess was not content with merely converting one of the most powerful mansabdars in the Mughal empire to her cult—the poet shows the goddess pitting her strength against that of the Mughal emperor at the imperial court in Delhi. The *Annadamangala* depicts the goddess and her dreaded forces wreaking havoc on the city of Delhi and its citizens. Until, terrified and humbled by the might of the goddess, the Mughal *padshah* agreed to worship her and acknowledge her greatness. In Bharatchandra's words, 'The padshah said, "If I worship at her [the Devi's] feet, I might gain refuge there."'[71]

The success of the goddess in compelling the Mughal emperor to acknowledge her greatness is shown through a most extraordinary passage in the poem which describes the ritual worship of the goddess being celebrated with great pomp and ceremony at the Mughal court in Delhi. The emperor also ordered all citizens of Delhi to worship the goddess in their homes. This development was intended to demonstrate beyond any doubt that despite the political power and prestige of the emperor as political overlord of the subcontinent, the goddess's divine power was far superior.[72]

This section of the *Annadamangala* also marked the climax of the temporal theme of the work. In Bharatchandra's portrayal, Man Singh interceded with the Mughal emperor and secured for Bhabananda an imperial farman, confirming his enjoyment of zamindari rights over his estates in Bengal. The latter also received a number of honorific gifts from the emperor as reward for his collaboration with the Mughal forces which had been sent to Bengal to destroy Raja Pratapaditya. It is unusual in Mangalkavyas of earlier periods to depict their mortal heroes being rewarded or elevated to high office by a more powerful human figure. Here Bharatchandra revealed his understanding of the political hierarchy of eighteenth century India—the confirmation of the zamindari title by the Mughal emperor together with symbols of rank that accompanied it would enhance and reinforce the legitimacy and status of the Nadia rajas within Bengal. This incident in the poem also demonstrates the sanctity attached to the *farman*, a written document embodying the Mughal emperor's grant of the zamindari right to Bhabananda. Bharatchandra painted a memorable scene in which the farman itself was given a ceremonial welcome by the friends and family of Bhabananda Majumdar upon his return to his estate.[73] As seen in Chapter 1, the proliferation of such ceremonials and rituals around imperial orders, letters, and documents indicated the flowering of a kind of imperial cult among Mughal officials, which emphasized loyalty and devotion to the person of the emperor as well as a tradition of devoted service to the polity. In this case Bhabananda was a participant in the rituals associated with this Mughal imperial cult. To my knowledge, the older Mangalkavyas did not usually show this kind of awareness of the Mughal empire, the Mughal padshah, or Mughal administrative documents such as the farman, in quite the same manner. Finally, the grant of the farman by Emperor Jehangir to Bhabananda, provided the poet with an opportunity to express his aristocratic patron's (and possibly his own) animosity towards his immediate political superior, the Murshidabad nawab.

The features noted above in both these works were integrated into a broader interpretive perspective which was grounded in sequences of events. These events in turn, were linked to causal explanations and both narratives fitted into an overarching worldview which situated itself deliberately in a Puranic format. Within this format, however, the actual hard political realities and contingencies of eighteenth century Bengal—whether from the perspective of a raja's *sabha*, or, from that of the nawab and those around him—needed to be made comprehensible, lodged in a format and communicated in a mode which was acceptable and comprehensible to ordinary people. The latter were, after all, the ultimate constituents from whom both the Raja of Nadia and the Nawab of Murshidabad sought the legitimacy they urgently needed. The itihasa tradition and, more particularly, the Puranic tradition, were characterized by an impulse to constantly change and recast themselves in order to keep abreast of current times. From this angle, the shifts and new features which appeared in the *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana* conformed to the inherent characteristic of the itihasa/Purana tradition. I argue that the idiom in which the vernacular itihasa tradition, represented by the Mangalkavyas, sought to make space for the political issues of the time was influenced by a Persianized political culture associated with the Mughal empire. The Persianized element in these Mangalkavyas particularly resembled features of the Indo-Persian tarikh tradition.

Historicizing Transgression

The departures from the usual generic/Puranic features exhibited by these two texts can be related to the historical context of early modern Bengal. As seen in Chapter I, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had been unusually turbulent periods in the history of Bengal. The career of the short-lived Murshidabad *niabat* was also marked by many sharp ups and downs. The effects of these two eventful centuries had been particularly noticeable on Bengal's territorial aristocracy in particular.

The departures from the established generic features of the Mangalkavya tradition in the *Annadamangala* can be located in the nexus of relations prevailing among the zamindars of Nadia, the nawabs of Murshidabad and the Mughal emperor at Delhi. As the *Kshitishvamsavalicharitam* indicates, the Mughals were represented as distant but beneficent

overlords from whom they periodically received titles and rewards. The Murshidabad nawabs, their more immediate political overlords, are depicted in a more ambivalent manner. The repeated instances, when these rajas suffered physical harassment, imprisonment, and public humiliation at the hands of the nawab's government, are explicitly mentioned both in the *Kshitishvamsavalicharitam* and the *Annadamangala*. As the former text also demonstrates, the relationship of the Nadia zamindars was never totally ruptured on account of the repeated episodes of imprisonment. But it was nevertheless a prickly and sensitive relationship.

The indignities suffered by the rajas were a serious affront to the prestige and standing of this family who possessed one of the larger zamindaris in western Bengal. More importantly, it hurt their image as the leaders of Brahminical society in Bengal. In this context, the *Annadamangalkavya* composed at the behest of Maharaja Krishnachandra by his court poet, himself the son of a recently dispossessed landed family, can perhaps be seen as a narrative which sought to function as a response to the political and cultural crises affecting the raja. It attempted to reinforce the raja's status and place in the fast-paced political changes affecting Bengal as well as in the web of complex alliances and loyalties which had come to characterize the political configuration of contemporary India. This project was most urgent vis-à-vis the Nadia raja's immediate constituency (the courtiers, protégées, kinsmen, and the bulk of his subjects) who formed the expected audience of a Mangalkavya performance. The *Annadamangala* also sought to accomplish this task by highlighting the fact that the rajas of Nadia held territorial authority by virtue of an authorization from the Mughal emperor. The legitimacy and sanctity of their position was strengthened by the fact that they were the chosen favourites of the goddess Annada—a condition which also established unquestionably their roles as the upholders of virtue and dharma. This endeavour also attempted to preserve untarnished the claim of the Nadia rajas to be the leaders of Brahminical society (and particularly of kulina Brahmin society/samaja) in Bengal—a claim that was intimately intertwined with their self-image. The *Annadamangala*, thus reinforced the dharmic connection of the zamindars of Nadia to the goddess Annada; politically, it sought to de-emphasize the authority of the Murshidabad nawabs and to portray these zamindars as recepients of imperial favour from the Mughal emperor himself.

The non-generic features in the *Maharashtapurana*, in my view, allow us to locate it within the network of connections that had emerged in Mughal and nawabi Bengal between the literate gentry and aristocracy of the region and the figures entrusted with its government. The role of the literate gentry in particular is of special significance here. As Chapter 1 indicated, the Muslim regimes in Bengal had for centuries followed the practice of employing literate, upper class, and often upper-caste Hindus to important official posts. This practice continued and probably expanded during the Mughal and nawabi periods. As posited by the Calkins thesis three regional groups, that is, the large landholders, wealthy merchants and the military aristocracy, constituted the vital support base of the rule of the Murshidabad nawabs. What the Calkins model fails to acknowledge is the practice of the Murshidabad government of reaching out to a large range of middle-level, literate gentry families as well. Such families were employed in large numbers at all levels of the nawabi adminsitration and many benefitted handsomely from their association with it. Through competent and meritorious service some rose to the highest ranks of the bureaucracy and could become part of the ruling circle around the nawab. Gangaram, the author of the *Maharashtapurana*, seems to belong to just such a literate gentry background. There is no direct evidence to suggest that he had composed this poetic work at the behest of the nawab; or, that his intention in authoring it was to 'whitewash' the nawab and the nawabi government. But, on the other hand, it is indeed likely that persons of his social/professional background had developed a stake in the continuation of the nawabi government for purposes of career advancement and the support of scholarly and poetic endeavours.[74]

Another factor which also helps us to contextualize the non-generic features in the *Maharashtapurana* relates to the extremely serious consequences faced by the nawab's government as a function particularly of the Maratha invasions. This regime had come to power only about half a century or so ago and while its links to some segments of the population have been noted, it probably did not enjoy the traditions of deep-rooted loyalty and attachment based on long association with the region and its people at large. The other pressures faced by them such as dynastic coups, the need to adopt a tough and ruthless financial policy, strained their credibility and image. The devastation caused to Bengal by the Bargi raids is referred to by all scholarly works on Bengal. But, the full extent to which these invasions affected the credibility

and political legitimacy of the Bengal nawabs has perhaps not yet been fully appreciated.

The Maratha invasions devastated Bengal economically and materially through the disruption of trade and production and the plunder and sack of towns like Murshidabad, Hugli, and Katwa.[75] It did not totally destroy but it seriously strained the coalition believed to have been forged by the nawabs with certain important segments of the population.[76] The flight of a large number of people to the English enclave at Calcutta reinforced doubts about the nawab's ability to defend his realm and protect his subjects.[77] But much worse, Ali Vardi's financial extortions on merchants and shroffs during this time and the pillage and plunder indulged in by his own undisciplined troops, often blurred the distinction as far as ordinary people were concerned, between his side and the external invaders. There were damaging rumours that 'the Morattoes are an army legally empowered to make a thorough change in the government rather than an army of robbers...'.[78]

Given the immediate environment against which the *Maharashtapurana* was composed, it is perhaps not untenable to suggest that this narrative might embody the effort of a segment of Bengali gentry to rationalize, through the language and idiom of the well-known and well-liked genre of the Mangalkavya, the position and powers of the nawabs of Bengal in the political geography of eighteenth century India, and also perhaps to position the nawab as an ethical ruler who had been especially singled out by the goddess for her blessing. As seen above, the Bargi invasions shook the moral and material underpinnings of this regime to an extent which is not entirely appreciated and cast doubts on Ali Vardi's legitimacy as a ruler. Thus ruling circles around the nawab—which may have included gentry elements like Gangaram—felt the urgent need to assure the subjects about the continuing political and moral legitimacy of Nawab Ali Vardi Khan's reign. The *Maharashtapurana* may thus have functioned as a vehicle for this endeavour.

Another factor which helps us to historicize and contextualize the departures from textual tradition, noticed in the *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana*, is the transmission and strengthening of a Persianized/ Mughal political culture in Bengal[79] and more particularly perhaps, the Indo-Persian tarikh tradition, which comprised an important component of it. The two mid-eighteenth century Mangalkavyas discussed so far included a fair number of Persian words. This is particularly apparent in the segment of the *Annadamangala* where Bharatchandra depicts a spirited argument between Bhabananda Majumdar, the zamindar of

Nadia and the Mughal padshah at the imperial court at Delhi.[80] This fits in with the view of Suniti Kumar Chatterji (discussed more fully in the next chapter) that exposure to Mughal rule had produced an influx of Persian words into the Bengali language from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[81] However, the point to be underscored is that the *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana* show that the non-generic features in them transcended the presence of Persian vocabulary. In fact, the manner in which both these narratives presented the political story of struggles between the nawab and the Bargis on the one hand, and between the Raja of Nadia and the Mughals primarily on the other, it is possible to identify the imprint of tarikh literature.

Both the *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana* reveal features of what had become almost 'classic' or generic features of the Mangalkavya tradition. Both these narratives also reveal a political imagination in which the Mughal factor is strongly enshrined. The political struggles depicted in both kavyas are framed by the Mughal political system. In this system, the political actors were connected to each other by complex and diverse ties of loyalty, obligation, protection, and authority; a strain or rupture in any of these linkages produced a crisis which is cast in these texts both as a crisis of dharma as well as a crisis of political normativity. The phenomemon of political ascendancy—shown here through the rising fortunes of Bhabananda Majumdar—is also depicted in terms of the logic of Mughal political and administrative culture. Bhabananda's advancement up the rungs of the subcontinental political system was dependent upon his performance of loyal service to the Mughal polity and each increment in his rank, prestige, and landholding had to be duly authorized and ratified by the imperial centre at Delhi. These and other issues—for example, the ethical and political consequences of disloyalty to overlords, the gravity of failing to discharge tribute obligations, the importance of rewarding political loyalty—which are showcased in the *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana*, also find recurrent representation in the tradition of tarikh literature which developed in and around political circles in Mughal India. These characteristic features of the tarikh tradition have been discussed in Chapter 1.

This is not to suggest that the presence of these features in the *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana* represent the straight transplantation of an Arabic/Persian historiographical tradition into Bengali narratives. It is more accurate to characterize it as a creative, but selective appropriation of certain defining traits from the tarikh corpus.

The tendency of Persian tarikhs to incorporate intertextual allusions to events and incidents from Persia's history for instance, does not find accommodation here—instead these two narratives incorporate Puranic allusions in the true tradition of Mangalkavyas. However, these texts quite demonstrably embodied certain idioms, a certain 'language' for talking about and explaining the complexities of political power and political relationships which are reminiscent of the tarikh tradition and which, I argue, had been appropriated from the tarikh tradition. The tarikh tradition was a formal, written tradition—in no way associated with performance; the Mangalkavyas were just that. Thus the influence of Persianization on Mangalkavyas also signifies the migration of certain features associated solely with a written tradition into a performance-oriented medium. The percolation of the idiom of tarikh literature into an essentially performative genre like the Mangalkavyas marks a truly remarkable phennomenon. It points to the potency of a Mughal/Persianized culture—of which the tarikh tradition constitutes an important manifestation—among segments of Bengal's aristocracy and gentry. This potency caused elements of the tarikh tradition to be mirrored in performance narratives either commissioned by the elites or composed by them. Conversely, but not unrelated to the former statement, is the proposition that the realities of political power and its configurations in Bengal and the rest of the subcontinent during the eighteenth century, were deemed important and urgent for all those who were role players in it. A popular performance-oriented medium like the Mangalkavya thus came to be deployed as the vernacular channel through which tangled webs of political alliances and tensions, and their no-less important repercussions on status, prestige, and legitimacy, could be explained to the constituency on whose loyalty, respect, and support the political power of the Raja of Nadia or the nawab of Murshidabad ultimately rested.

A comparison of the *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana* with a near-contemporary Mangalkavya, that is, the *Gaurimangala* written at the turn of the nineteenth century, serves both to validate the central issue of this chapter as well to indicate its limits.

THE *GAURIMANGALA:* A POINT OF CONTRAST

The author of the *Gaurimangala* situated his work against a pre-existing tradition of Bengali panchali literature which included many earlier Mangalkavyas (including Bharatchandra's *Annadamangala*),

Krittibasa's *Ramayana* and Kashiramdasa's *Mahabharata*.[82] Most of the *Gaurimangala* is devoted to recounting Puranic stories about various deities.

Juxtaposed against this is a fascinating, allegorical account about the loss of a kingdom named Abanti by a king, its usurpation by an evil conqueror and its eventual recovery from the clutches of the usurper. Predictably, this account about the loss and recovery of a kingdom is strongly underpinned by issues of dharma and adharma, that is, virtue and sin. Thus the *Gaurimangala* too incorporates a story centred on the political/dharmic struggle over a kingdom, like the *Maharashtapurana* and the *Annadamangala*. Yet, very significantly, the idiom that encapsulates this episode in the *Gaurimangala* is exclusively Puranic. There are neither explicit nor implicit suggestions of a Mughal context for the story of the loss and recovery of a kingdom and the eventual destruction of a sinful usurping ruler.

In the *Gaurimangala* the sinfulness of the evil conqueror called Madrasena is manifest in acts such as the slaughter of cows, the consumption of beef, the disregard of varna/jati distinctions, the advocacy of widow remarriage and disregard for the Vedas and the Shastras.[83] Madrasena was finally overthrown by Prince Jimutavahana, the son of the good king who had originally lost the kingdom to the villain of the story, through the blessings of the goddess Gauri or Abhaya. The real significance of Jimutavahana's success in defeating and destroying Madrasena is first a testimony to the power of the goddess who could, through her powers, enable a mortal protegee to prevail over all odds. Secondly, it meant the re-establishment of a dharmic order once again in the kingdom of Abanti. The moral order in Jimutavahana's kingdom was based on shastric texts and respect for the views of Brahmin scholars.

In this obviously allegorical episode, the name of the kingdom in question and the names of all the characters involved in the struggle over it are either Puranic names, or names taken from Sanskrit literature. The language of the entire narrative, including the part dealing with the episode of the loss and recovery of the kingdom of Abanti, is singularly free of Persian vocabulary. Raja Prithvichandra was supposedly well-educated in Persian; but in this literary work, his knowledge of or familiarity with Persian is not in evidence at all.

Despite many similarities with the *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana*, the *Gaurimangala* did not possess either an

awareness of a Mughal, subcontinental polity which was multilayered or use an idiom reminiscent of a Mughal Persianized political culture in fleshing out the story of the loss and retrieval of the kingdom of Abanti. It is in this absence of a clearly Mughal political context that this particular episode of the *Gaurimangala* differs so markedly from both the *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana* despite the fact that all three of them deal with issues regarding material struggles over kingdoms and kingly power.

By the time of the composition of the *Gaurimangala*, the overlordship of the Mughal emperor or the immediate suzerainty of the Mughal nawabs had ceased to be relevant for many of Bengal's landed aristocracy. Bengal was now under the sovereign rule of the East India Company. The very next chapter shows that even after the demise of the Mughal-nawabi order in Bengal, certain historiographic narratives, particularly about kings, were still being cast in a Persianate mode. However, while Mughal cultural/historiographical influences may have lingered on in certain types of Bengali narratives, the *Gaurimangala* indicates that the Mughal factor may not have been perceived to be relevant or germane in others. The aristocratic author of this narrative did not cast the story in the context of a paramount Mughal authority. Thus, in a way, the *Gaurimangala* reinforces the central point of the chapter that contingent concerns often shaped historiographic narratives in early modern Bengal. Here, to Raja Prithvichandra, the Mughal-nawabi order was probably no longer part of a contemporary political landscape.

Secondly, the *Gaurimangala* also helps to indicate the limits of a Persianate culture in Mughal-nawabi Bengal. Not only during the early nineteenth century, but also during the latter part of the eighteenth, very many panchali-type narratives were composed which were oblivious of the Mughal context, or chose not to reflect them. The purpose in indicating Persianized features in the historiographical segments of the *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana* is not to posit that Persianization had become a sweeping force vis-à-vis Bengali literary productions of the early modern period. The limits of Persianization in Mughal Bengal, both in the context of historiographical narratives as well as other kinds of literary compositions, have been discussed in Chapter 7. This chapter identified important features deriving from Mughal political culture, which had became evident in some Mangalkavya texts during the eighteenth century.

NOTES

1. Sukumar Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa*, vol. 1, 1405 BS, Calcutta, p. 103.

2. Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 103–19.

3. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. 103–4; Sukumar Sen (ed.), *Kabikankan Birachita Chandimangala*, Calcutta, pp. 16–18.

4. Ashutosh Bhattacharya, *Bangla Mangalkabyer Itihasa*, Calcutta, 2000 (rpt), pp. 110–11, 115–16.

5. Excerpts from Bengali literature which prove this point can be found, for example, in S. Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa,* vol.1, pp. 104, 108, 114.

6. Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 128–9; for a useful discussion of the multifaceted nature and function of the Mangalkavyas, see David L. Curley, *Poetry and History: Bengali Mangal-kabya and Social Change in Pre-Colonial Bengal,* New Delhi, 2008.

7. Bhattacharya, *Mangalkabyer Itihasa*, pp. 177.

8. S. Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa,* vols 1 and 2; A. Bhattacharya, *Mangalkabyer Itihasa.*

9. S. Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa*, vol. 1, pp. 79–80; R.C. Hazra, *Studies in the Upapuranas,* 2 vols, Calcutta, 1958 and 1963; Kunal Chakrabarty, *Religious Process: The Puranas and the Making of a Regional Tradition*, New Delhi, 2001; K. Chatterjee, 'Communities, Kings and Chronicles: The Kulagranthas of Bengal', *Studies in History,* vol. 21, no. 2, pp. 173–213.

10. Bhattacharya, *Mangalkabyer Itihasa*, pp. 431–58; also, Sudhibhushan Bhattacharya (ed.), *Dwija Madhab Rachita Mangalchandir Geet*, 1952, Calcutta, see Preface, no pp.

11. Satyanarayan Bhattacharya (ed.), *Kobi Krishnaram Daser Granthabali,* Calcutta, 1958.

12. A large secondary literature exists on oral and performance literature in South Asia. Representative examples include, Stuart Blackburn, *Singing of Birth and Death. Texts in Performance*, Philadelphia, 1988; Philip Lutgendorf, *The Life of a Text. Performing the Ramcharitmanas of Tulsidas*, Berkeley, 1991; Kirin Narayan, *Storytellers, Saints and Scoundrels. Folk Narrative in Hindu Religious Teaching*, Philadelphia, 1989, and others.

13. Bhattacharya, *Mangalkabyer Itihasa*, pp. 90–1.

14. S. Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa*, vol. 2, p. 246.

15. Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral,* Cambridge, 1987.

16. Achintya Kumar Biswas (ed.), *Bipradas Pipilaier Manasamangala*, Calcutta, 2002, pp. 1–12.

17. I have relied on individual Mangalkavya texts, for example, Mukunda Chakrabarty's *Chandimangala* as given in S. Sen, *Kabikankan Birachita Chandimangala*, as well as detailed discussions in S. Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa*, vols 1 and 2 to arrive at conclusions regarding general features of performances, ownership of Mangalkavya texts, their find-spots, and other such features.

18. Edward C. Dimock Jr and Pratul Chandra Gupta (eds, annotators and trs), *Maharashtapurana: An Eighteenth Century Bengali Historical Text*, Calcutta, 1985 (rpt), Appendix, 1, pp. 63–6.

19. S. Sen, Panchanan Mandal, Sunanda Sen (eds), Rupram Chakrabarti, *Dharmamangala*, Calcutta, 1956.

20. See Mss. nos 3223 and 3224, Manuscript Library, Calcutta University. I was unable to locate the first part of Narasimha Basu's work in Calcutta University's manuscript collection and have therefore relied on excerpts in Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa,* vol. 2, pp. 155–8.

21. Ibid., vols 1 and 2; A. Bhattacharya, *Mangalkabyer Itihasa*.

22. Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa*, vol. 2, p. 241.

23. Sen, *Kabikankan Chandi*, pp. 42, 158; Brojendranath Bandyopadhyaya and Sajanikanta Das (eds), *Bharatchandra Granthabali,* 1369 BS, Calcutta, p. 34.

24. S. Bhattacharya, *Kobi Krishnaram Daser Granthabali*, Calcutta, 1958, p. 165.

25. Bandyopadhyaya and Das, *Bharatchandra Granthabali*, pp. 12–14.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid., p. 297.

28. Nagendranath Basu (ed.), *Tirthamangal of Bijoyram Sen 'Bisharad'*, Calcutta, 1916.

29. S. Sen, *Kabikankan Chandi,* pp. 3–4.

30. Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa*, vol. 2, pp. 149, 153–4.

31. Bandyopadhyaya and Das, *Bharatchandra Granthabali*, 'Annadamangal', pp. 39–350; this reference, p. 290.

32. S. Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa*, vol. 1, pp. 115–17.

33. S. Sen (ed.), *Kabikankan Chandi*, p. 28.

34. Ibid., pp. 66–9.

35. Mukunda Chakrabarty's famous autobiographical account or the references made by the poet Bharatchandra Roy to his life and the circumstances of his family in his *Annadamangalkabya* are illustrative

of this. See S. Sen (ed.), *Kabikankan Chandi*; also Bandyopadhyaya and Das, 'Annadamangal'.

36. All references to the contents of this verse-narrative are based on the text of the work reproduced in Dimock and Gupta (eds and trans), *Maharashtapurana*.

37. All references to the contents of this verse-narrative are based on the text reproduced in Bandyopadhyaya and Das (eds), 'Annadamangal', pp. 39–350.

38. Bandyopadhyaya and Das, *Bharatchandra Granthabali*, pp. 17–18.

39. Ibid., pp. 23–34.

40. *Kshitishvamsavalicharitam. A Chronicle of the Family of Raja Krishnachandra of Navadvipa*, W. Pertsch (ed. and trans.) in Mohit Roy (ed.), *Kshitishvamshavalicharit*, Calcutta, 1986, p. 242.

41. David L. Curley, 'Maharaja Krishnachandra, Hindusim and Kingship in the Contact Zone of Bengal', in Richard D. Barnett (ed.), *Rethinking Early Modern India*, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 85–117.

42. Pertsch, *Kshitish* pp. 250–8; also Aloke Kumar Chakrabarty, *Maharaja Krishnachanda O Tatkalin Bangasamaj*, Calcutta, 1989, pp. 1–12.

43. Ibid.

44. Chakrabarty, *Maharaja Krishnachandra*, pp. 146–74.

45. Byomkesh Mustafi, 'Kabi Gangaram O Maharashtrapurana', *Sahitya Parishad Patrika*, vol. 13, no. 4, 1313 BS, Calcutta, pp. 193–236; Kedarnath Majumdar, 'Kabi Gangaram O Maharashtrapurana', *Sahitya Parishad Patrika*, vol. 14, no. 4, 1315 BS, Calcutta, pp. 248–53.

46. Majumdar, Kedarnath, 'Kabi Gangaram O Maharashtrapurana'.

47. K.K. Datta, 'A Brief History of the Pakur Raj', in Bimanbehari Majumdar (ed.), *Gaurimangala by Raja Prithvichandra of Pakur*, pp. xvii–xxvii.

48. For a discussion of general criteria of and the reason why the *Annadamangala* should be regarded as a Mangalkavya, see Clinton B. Seely and Frederika V. Miller, 'Secular and Sacred Legitimation in Bharatchandra Roy's *Annadamangal*', *Archiv Orientalni*, vol. 68, 2000, pp. 327–58.

49. Bandyopadhyaya and Das, 'Annadamangal', pp. 39–160.

50. Ibid., pp. 161–290.

51. Ibid., pp. 291–389.

52. Dimock and Gupta (eds), *Maharashtapurana*, p. xx.

53. Velcheru Narayan Rao, David Shulman, Sanjay Subrahmanyam,

Textures of Time: Writing History in South India, 1600–1800, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 238–39.

54. *Maharashtapurana*, pp. 15–18.

55. Rao-Shulman-Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*, p. 238.

56. *Maharashtapurana*, pp. 23–9.

57. Ibid., p. 52.

58. Existing scholarship (for example, Ranajit Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India: A Nineteenth Century Agenda and its Implications*, 1988, Calcutta; and Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, Princeton, 1993) demonstrates the importance assigned by 'modern' Indian/Bengali historiography of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to distinguishing itself from earlier modes of recounting the past by attempting to eliminate supernatural, fantastic stories as casual factors. For a view which posits the continuing existence of the fantastic and the 'mythic' side by side with the 'modern', rational historiography, see, Chapter 7.

59. Sir Jadunath Sarkar (ed.), *History of Bengal: Muslim Period 1200–1757*, Patna, 1973, p. 457.

60. For example, Bandyopadhyaya and Das, *Bharatchandra Granthabali*, pp. 17–18; A. Bhattacharya, *Mangalkabyer Itihasa*, pp. 833–51; Dushan Zbavitel, *History of Bengali Literature*, Weisbaden, 1976, pp. 199–200 and others.

61. A very strongly worded description in these terms is to be found for instance in Dinesh Chandra Sen, *Banga Bhasha O Sahitya*, 2 vols, (ed.), Asit Kumar Bandyopadhyaya, Calcutta, 2002 (rpt), this reference: 2, pp. 559–64, 589–99.

62. S. Sen, *Kabikankan Chandi*, p. 3.

63. Dimock and Gupta, *Maharashtapurana*, pp.15–40, Bandyopadhyaya and Das, 'Annadamangal', pp. 291–389.

64. Rupram, Chakrabarty, *Dharmamangala*, in Sen, Mandal, Sen (eds).

65. S. Sen, *Kabikankan Chandi*, pp. 66–83.

66. *Maharashtapurana*, pp. 17–22.

67. Bandyopadhyaya and Das, 'Annadamangal', pp. 10 and 161.

68. W. Pertsch, *Kshitish*.

69. Bandyopadhyaya and Das (eds), *Bharatchandra Granthabali*, pp. 23–34.

70. According to Mirza Nathan (author of the seventeenth century work, the *Bahristan-i-Ghaibi*, 2 vols (ed. and trans.) M.I. Borah (1936 Gauhati), who had personally participated in the Mughal campaign

against Pratapaditya in 1612, the commmander of the Mughal forces was Islam Khan, then Mughal subahdar of Bengal and not Raja Man Singh as represented by the *Annadamangala*. See also, Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, pp. 247–72 for a discussion of this point. Ramram Basu's *Pratapaditya Charitra*, Searampore, 1801, also depicts Man Singh as the vanquisher of Pratapaditya.

71. Bandyopadhyaya and Das, 'Annadamangal', p. 320.

72. Ibid., pp. 303–21.

73. Ibid., pp. 298, 329.

74. N.N. Ghose, *Memoirs of Maharaja Nubkissen Bahadur*, 1901, Calcutta; Ramcharan Chakrabarty (ed.), Baneshwar Bidyalankar, *Chitra Champu,* Benaras, 1940; Kalimaya Ghatak, *Charitashtaka*, Calcutta, 1930; Ramendrasundar Tribedi, 'Ekkhani Prachin Dalil', *Sahitya Parishat Patrika,* vol. 6, no. 4, 1306 BS, pp. 297–300.

75. The *Annadamangal* and the *Maharashtrapuran* contain graphic descriptions of the horrors perpetrated by the Bargis as do other eighteenth century narratives produced in Bengal, such as the *Madanmohanbandana* and Baneshwar Bidyalankar's *Chitrachampu.*

76. Bengal Public Consultations (BPC): P/1/15, 3 May, 1742, 6 May, 1742.

77. Ibid., 3 June 1742.

78. BPC, 18 May 1742; 5 August 1742.

79. The genealogy, nature, and contours of a Persanized political culture associated with the Mughal empire is discussed in much greater details in Chapter 7.

80. Bandyopadhyaya and Das, 'Annadamangal', pp. 305–11.

81. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*, New Delhi, 2002 (rpt). This point is discussed further in Chapter 4.

82. Majumdar (ed.), *Gaurimangala*, pp. 511–12.

83. Ibid., pp. 387, 424–7.

4

Prose Narratives of Kings

Between 'Old' and 'New'

This chapter focuses on a group of Bengali prose narratives which were composed during the first decade of the nineteenth century. These narratives represented accounts of past kings and their deeds—one of the most common topics in pre-modern historiography. Kings figured centrally in pre-modern historiographic narratives partly because of their prominence and power and partly because their actions affected the fates of the subject population. Kings represented the moral climates of the polities they ruled, the king's body being often perceived as an embodiment of the polity itself. Thus, accounts of kings served to commemorate the lives and actions of eminent individuals; at another level, they also encompassed the experiences of the community of subjects as well.[1]

This chapter traces the historiographic substance and style of this cluster of prose narratives. These texts hold a celebrity status on account of several factors: they are widely regarded as early examples of Bengali prose; they represent some of the earliest printed texts in the region and language; they are associated with the emergence of a modern literary culture in Bengal; and finally, they are associated with the compulsions of the early colonial state in the region. Since the historiographic status of these texts is intertwined with their status as early examples of a definitive Bengali prose, the present discussion foregrounds the exploration of their historiographical significance by tracing the genealogy and history of Bengali prose. Like many other societies, Bengal too had produced verse literature for many centuries in

the most commonly used language of the region, that is, Bengali, prior to what is conventionally regarded as the definitive advent of a prose style in that language during the early nineteenth century. My aims are, first, to reflect on the significance attached by scholars to the transition of a literary culture from verse to prose, and to consider whether the issues raised by this discussion are applicable to the region and the literary/historical culture studied here. Secondly, this chapter discusses the history of prose-use in Bengal prior to the nineteenth century and the linguistic and literary influences which affected it. Thirdly, this chapter suggests that influences from the Persian language and literary culture functioned as a significant influence on Bengali prose, especially during the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries. Finally, a cluster of prose narratives works in Bengali are discussed thoroughly to illustrate the features mentioned above.

The Transition from Verse to Prose

Scholars of various persuasions have reflected upon and discussed the significance of the transition from verse to prose in any given society. As the linguistic traditions of Greek, Latin, Arabic, English, Spanish, German and certainly many South Asian languages indicate, verse often preceded prose.[2] As Bakhtin points out, prose represented more than just a genre; it indicated on the contrary, a form of thinking that presumed the importance of the everyday, the ordinary, and the prosaic. Literary theorists have also pointed out that the emergence of a new genre in effect reflected significant changes in social life.[3] Scholars like Godzich and Kittay and Gabrielle Spiegel have made the case that the advent of prose as the language of literary expression was connected to shifts in the political and cultural order and to the attendant quest for new modes of expression, particularly historiographic expression.

While these reflections on the significance of the emergence of a prose genre as a mode of literary expression raise powerful intellectual issues, they do not quite help us in trying to understand the advent of a Bengali prose language or its significance for the composition of historical narratives. In Bengal, it was not the prose genre per se that was new, but rather its use in the regional vernacular. Secondly, it was not just any prose use in Bengali, but its use to produce expressive narratives.

History and Context of Prose-Use in Bengal

Several languages (that is, other than just for purposes of speaking) had circulated in Bengal at least since the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—particularly among the literate gentry and aristocracy. As seen in Chapter 1, Sanskrit, Persian, and Bengali, the principal linguistic and literary registers, were used for different purposes and performed different functions. This, however, was not a simple form of multilingualism since each language and its literary culture created 'a hierarchy of discourses each of which represented a different set of values, behaviour and attitudes'.[4] The need for prose—identified sometimes with material, practical uses, especially during its early phases—was met most often in Bengal by the use of the two main supra-regional languages in use at the time, that is, Sanskrit and Persian.

The reason for the non-development of a robust mode of Bengali prose prior to the nineteenth century is attributed to a number of factors, not all of which can be accepted unreservedly. These range from the view that many centuries of literary convention discouraged the use of Bengali for literary prose compositions, to the assertion that relatively low levels of literacy together with the largely oral character of pre-modern Bengali society impeded the development of a vigorous prose literature. Gholam Murshed also refers to the nature and culture of governance in Bengal prior to colonial rule and describes it as one in which the culture of writing was relatively limited when compared to the governmental culture ushered in by the rule of the English East India Company.[5] Given the fairly intensive 'documentary' nature of Mughal governmental culture, it is hard to accept without more evidence that the regime of the nawabs of Murshidabad would deliberately subvert or reduce it. The remark regarding the overall importance of orality in Bengal prior to the advent of colonial rule and, with it, the culture of print, is of course valid at a general level. But we need to keep in mind that despite such all-pervasive orality, it was nevertheless a culture which had been accustomed for many centuries to strong traditions of writing. The issue therefore is not so much the absence of writing per se, or the absence of prose writing, but the fact that the language of choice for such writing was not Bengali. Here, the argument about the continuing power and legitimacy of the Bengali verse genre as well as the point about prose needs being met through the use of Persian and Sanskrit may be much more persuasive.

The most commonly held view is that Bengali prose made its appearance quite dramatically at the very beginning of the nineteenth century on account of the compulsions of the early colonial state in Bengal.[6] In 1800, the East India Company's government in Bengal established the Fort William College for the purpose of providing newly-arrived officials of the company with a degree of familiarity and proficiency in the languages they were likely to encounter in the course of their administrative career in the company's dominions in India. This 'Oxford of the East'[7] was to provide instruction in Arabic, Persian, and Sanskrit, six Indian vernacular languages and several other subjects. The Bengali department of the college was placed under the charge of William Carey, one of the famous trio of Baptist missionaries associated with the Srirampur (Searampore) mission. Carey's perception that there was a total dearth of suitable Bengali prose books prompted him to commission three Bengali scholars—Ramram Basu, Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar, and Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya—to produce texts in Bengali which could be used as classroom material. This initiative led to the production of the first cluster of Bengali prose narratives. These were the *Pratapaditya Charitra* by Ramram Basu (1801), Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya's *Maharaja Krishnachandra Royasya Charitram* (1805), and Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar's *Rajabali* (1808).[8] This development was a command-performance activated by the early colonial state rather than an organic development. Thus, what is more significant than the choice of Bengali for the composition of these works, is the style and contents of these works and also the models and influences from which they may have been derived.

By far the most pervasive truism about the Bengali language and literature is that it was descended from Sanskrit and therefore Sanskrit literature and literary style provided a template and a model for it. While this is undoubtedly true, this view was articulated through the first dictionaries and grammars of Bengali which made their appearance in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries thanks to the efforts of European scholar-officials and missionaries. Since Bengali does not appear to have been studied formally (through grammars and dictionaries) during the pre-nineteenth century period by the indigenous literati, we cannot speak of their views and assumptions about the linguistic and literary heritage of this language.[9]

A history of the career of Persian in Bengal and its association with the history of pre-Mughal and Muslim rule has been discussed at some

length in Chapter 1. The following section traces the presence and influence of Persian in Bengal during the period of Mughal rule.

Persian and Bengali Prose: the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries

The view that the English East India Company was instrumental in making possible the definitive development of Bengali prose still enjoys a degree of currency. However, a large body of scholarship which was dedicated to finding samples of pre-nineteenth century Bengali prose has compelled a modification of this point of view.[10] There is now a degree of acceptance of the premise that that there had occurred a considerable expansion of Bengali prose-use during the seventeenth century and a further acceleration of this trend in the eighteenth.

The use of Bengali prose for letter-writing and documentary purposes continued as before, but prose was being deployed, perhaps in a limited, but no less significant way, for religious texts composed by Vaishnavas and Sahajiyas.[11] Bengal's administrative integration within the Mughal empire and the greater currency of the Persian language and literature in Bengal is regarded as a significant factor in this expansion of Bengali prose-use.[12] According to Sukumar Sen, the use of Bengali for practical reasons had become indispensable since the seventeenth century and the number of people who possessed high degrees of Sanskrit literacy began to decline in comparison to earlier periods. This was compensated by growing literacy in Persian, the language in which much administrative business was now being conducted. The full development of Bengali prose was still far away, but the influence of Persian is believed to have created distinctive features at this incipient stage. Both Sukumar Sen and Haraprasad Shastri attest to the emergence of a Persianized prose style from this period. This type of expression coexisted with other styles of expression—such as Sanskritic or 'panditi Bangla' for example—but it was nevertheless identifiable as a distinct mode.[13]

These views are reinforced by the fact that there was a steady influx of Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Hindusthani words into Bengali during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in particular. The expansion of Persian, Arabic, Turkish, and Hindusthani words in written expression—documentary (legal, judicial, official), epistolary, expressive narrative works as well as everyday speech—is generally acknowledged to have attained a remarkable level during this period.[14] The endeavour

of Suniti Kumar Chatterji to provide a chronological comparison of 'the rate of admission of Persian words into Bengali' over several centuries further confirms this (see table below). In the eighteenth century, even Persian-knowing Bengali pundits used Persianized expression in their letter-writing, petitions, and other writings. Murshed further asserts that there occurred the migration of a vocabulary of Persian/Arabic/Hindusthani origins into the everyday speech of educated Bengalis during the early nineteenth century.[15]

Table 4.1 Incidence of Persian Words in Bengali Texts: Fourteenth–Eighteenth Centuries

Title of Bengali Text	Date	Total Number of Lines	Approximate Number of Persian Words
Srikrishnakirtan of Badu Chandidas	late 14th century	9,500	4
Padmapuran of Vijay Gupta	late 15th century	18,000	125
Dharmamangal of Manikram Ganguly	mid 16th century	17,000	225
Chandikavya (*Chandimangal*) of Mukunda Chakrabarty	later 16th century	20,000	200–210
Annadamangal-kavya of Bharat-Chandra Roy	mid 18th century	13,000	over 400

Source: Suniti Kumar Chatterji, *The Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*, p. 204, footnote no. 1.

Suniti Kumar Chatterji, Sir J.N. Sarkar, and Sukumar Sen posit a direct relationship between the Mughal conquest of Bengal and the expanding currency of Persian and, in the case of Sen, their connection to the growing use of Bengali for prose compositions.[16] In general, though, the influx of Persian and Hindusthani words into Bengali, when noticed at all by scholars of Bengali literature and language, tends to be treated almost as an incidental phenomenon and the full implications of it for the society and culture of the region are not adequately explored. The reason may well lie in the declaration of Suniti Kumar Chatterji that 'the Persian influence on the Bengali language has been mainly lexical'.[17] As Chatterji further elaborates, 'the net result of the Persian

influence has been the imposition, as a permanent addition to the vocabulary, of some 2,500 [Persian] words.......'.[18] One of my main aims here is to prove that Persian, in early modern Bengal, was more than a 'lexical influence'. Since I approach Persianization as an aspect primarily of Mughal political culture, my perspective includes but does not remain confined only to purely linguistic matters. The phenomenon I call 'Persianization' was transmitted to Bengal through the medium of the Persian language as well as the literary culture of Persian and both were mediated through the incoming governmental culture and style of the Mughal state. These were mirrored, among other things, in the style and the political and temporal perspectives found in Bengali narrative accounts with a historiographic content. The subsequent section discusses the authors of the three Bengali prose narratives that are the central focus of this chapter. It is followed by a discussion of the narratives themselves.

The Authors

The scholars who composed the cluster of Bengali prose narratives commissioned by the Fort William College had been formally recruited by William Carey to serve in the Bengali department of that institution. The involvement of these scholars with various facets of early colonial enterprise during the eighteenth century highlights the critical need of the English to depend on indigenous scholarly collaborators during this period. The large numbers of Indian scholars associated with Colin Mackenzie in Southern India, the Calcutta Orientalists, and the East India Company's governmental circles as well as with missionary projects in Bengal, provide well-known examples of such collaboration. The link between these 'native informants' and the colonial state have been the topic of much debate and controversy among contemporary scholars regarding the formation of colonial knowledge and the very nature—hegemonic versus dialogic—of colonial power and colonial institutions in eighteenth and early nineteenth century India.[19] This debate is well-known; a recapitulation of it though lies beyond the scope of this book. However, it is necessary to be aware that the authors under discussion here also fitted into the overarching rubric of native informants who serviced various needs of the early colonial state.

Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya, the author of the *Maharaja Krishnachandra Roysya Charitram*, most probably had a family connection to the rajas of Nadia and chose as the main subject of his

narrative, the life and achievements of Maharaja Krishnachandra Roy of that family. Rajiblochan was well-acquainted with Sanskrit literature and scholarship. He may also have had a long association with Carey, but it is difficult to be certain about it.[20]

Ramram Basu had a prolonged association with various English enterprises in Bengal generally, and with Carey and the Baptist missionary project more particularly. He was born into a Kayastha family, probably at Chinsurah near Calcutta, around the middle of the eighteenth century. Basu's family may have had connections with a wealthy landowner somewhere in the Twenty Four Parganas or the Sunderban region.[21] The career track most common within Basu's family circle seems to have been as scribes, secretaries, and clerical employees in the bureaucracies maintained by landowning gentry and the nobility. In keeping with the practice among literate genteel families of this sort, Ramram Basu too received an education which involved proficiency in Sanskrit, Persian, and Bengali. Through his own efforts, he may have taught himself rudimentary English even prior to his contact with Carey.[22]

Basu's proficiency in multiple languages made him ideal as a tutor/translator/interpreter for Englishmen associated with various types of endeavours in eighteenth century Bengal. Ramram Basu first served as Persian tutor to William Chambers, a judge in the East India Company's Supreme Court at Calcutta; subsequently he became the Bengali munshi of John Thomas, a surgeon aboard one of the Company's ships, and also deeply interested in translating the Bible for purposes of proselytizing in Bengal. In 1793 Basu secured the position of munshi to William Carey—beginning a relationship, which although not uninterrupted, lasted probably until the former's death in 1813.[23]

Basu served as language instructor and perhaps translator to Carey primarily for Bengali and also at times for Sanskrit. At the behest of the Fort William College, he authored two books, the first being the *Raja Pratapaditya Charitra* (1801) which is discussed below. The second book, entitled the *Lipimala* (1802) was designed to provide examples of colloquial dialogues in Bengali and its intended audience were the sahibs who needed to learn the regional language.[24]

Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar was probably the best-known among the Bengali pundits commissioned to produce classroom materials for the Fort William College. Born in Midnapur in 1762, he received a formal education which emphasized the Sanskritic and shastric. He may have left Midnapur sometime in the 1790s and come to Calcutta in search

of a livelihood. In Calcutta, prior to his association with the company's college at Fort William he ran a *tol* from his residence at Baghbazar.[25] The multifarious needs of the early colonial state for Sanskrit-proficient pundits drew Mrityunjoy into the ambit of the activities of the colonial state. Carey recruited him as the chief pundit of the Bengali department of Fort William College. He was also Carey's Sanskrit tutor, possibly the ghostwriter of some of Carey's Bengali publications and served upon occasion as Carey's assistant in the classroom. Mrityunjoy was also associated with the Company's judicial establishment. He became the chief pundit of the Company's Supreme Court at Calcutta in 1816. In 1817, as part of his professional duty, he produced a vyavastha (opinion) pointing out that the scriptural sanction for sati was in fact ambiguous. Mrityunjoy's other publications included the *Batris Simhasan* (1802) and the *Rajabali* (1808). The former was a collection of popular stories about king Vikramaditya in Bengali and it was used as a textbook at the Fort William College. [26] The *Rajabali* is discussed below in greater detail. Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar's other publications included the *Hitopadesha* (1808) and the *Prabodhchandrika* (1819).[27]

THE *RAJA PRATAPADITYA CHARITRA*, *MAHARAJA KRISHNACHANDRA ROYSYA CHARITRAM*, AND THE *RAJABALI*

The *Pratapaditya Charitra* of Ramram Basu traced the rise to power of a family of chieftains (zamindars) in the Jessore region of Bengal during the interregnum between Afghan and Mughal rule and highlighted in particular the career and reign of Raja Pratapaditya. The narrative detailed the circumstances of Pratapaditya's rebellion against Mughal authority and its suppression by the latter. The theme of Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya's work recounted the circumstances through which the ancestors of Maharaja Krishnachnadra Roy of Nadia had acquired power and fame. While this theme provided a background, the prime focus of this text was on the reign of Maharaja Krishnachandra, whose life and reign coincided with the transfer of political power in Bengal from the nawabs of Murshidabad into the hands of the English company. The *Rajabali* of Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar also provided accounts of past kings and their reigns—but on a scale far wider than the framework adopted in either of these two charitras. The *Rajabali* was a true chronicle. The two other narratives discussed here focus mainly on single kingly personalities; accounts of the ancestors of these rajas served only to create a backdrop for the principal protagonists

of these texts. In the *Rajabali*, by contrast, the main aim was to highlight the continuous succession of kings of various dynasties for thousands of years. In the manner typical of chronicles, the *Rajabali* of Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar ended with an account of the contemporary ruler of Bengal, but left open the narrative possibility of another chronicler picking up the thread of this narrative and continuing to provide accounts of subsequent kings. This chronicle foregrounded its account in the creation of the universe and the earth in Puranic terms and provided on account of the 'waves' (*taranga*) of kings who had reigned over the earth. The account then traced the reigns of successive Puranic and epic kings through the reigns of the Sena kings of Bengal, the Rajput Chauhan rulers of Delhi and then on to the reigns of the *Turushka* sultans who ruled from Delhi. Mrityunjoy's narrative gave considerable weight in particular to the reigns of the Mughal emperors, especially that of the emperor Akbar, as well as to the reigns of the Murshidabad nawabs. This encyclopaedic chronicle of kings terminated with an account of the takeover of power in Bengal by the English—developments which had occurred a few years before Mrityunjoy's birth in AD 1762.

Sanskritic/Puranic Influences

The authors of all three texts positioned themselves within the Sanskrit literary tradition by using forms such as the charita and the *rajabali* or *Rajataranga*. In substantive terms too, these narratives are characterized by idioms and allusions associated with long-established literary–historical Indic traditions such as the Puranic tradition, the high tradition of Sanskrit courtly literature as well as the assumptions and premises linked with them. For example, the *Rajabali* of Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar begins with the Puranic explanation of how the earth and the universe itself was created and then expands to provide a description of cosmology, geography, and the notion of time itself as well as its related units and divisions in Puranic terms. The varnashrama-based social order, for example, is an essential premise in the geographical and cosmological imagination which Mrityunjoy had obviously derived from the Puranic corpus.[28] The successive kings described by Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar reigned over a region also located in terms of Puranic geography, that is, they were all kings of Madhyadesa, a component part of Bharatbarsha, which again was a part of the continent called Jambudvipa.[29]

The accomplishments and flaws of the kings described in the *Rajabali*

are also grounded in the cultural and ideological assumptions underlying the Puranic corpus in all its manifestations and variations.[30]

The imprint of a Puranic/Sanskritic tradition in these three prose works is neither surprising nor unexpected and contemporary scholarship pays due attention to it.[31] What remains unnoticed is the strong imprint of the Indo-Persian tarikh tradition in all three of these prose narratives. The presence of this feature is uneven in the three texts under discussion here: it is strongly noticeable in the *Pratapaditya Charitra.* Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar's *Rajabali* embodies this feature quite markedly in the part of the narrative devoted to a discussion of the reigns of various Turkish and Afghan rulers as well as the Mughals over Delhi. Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya's *Charitra* of Maharaja Krishnachandra Roy probably tries the hardest to associate itself with a Sanskritic tradition; but this text too, in many ways, incorporates features reminiscent of the Indo-Persian tarikh tradition. The following section explores further the specific features which mark the resonance of the Indo-Islamic tarikh tradition in these prose narratives.

Persianate Influences

One of the most obvious and visible markers of the Indo-Persian literary tradition in these Bengali texts is comprised by the heavy use of Persian terms in them. The narratives composed by Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar and Ramram Basu in particular contain the profuse usage of Persian vocabulary—usually words associated with a political and administrative culture such as subahdar, *takht*, *khelat*, *nazr*, *daftar*, *mulk*, *qanungo*, *bandobast*, and many others. Ramram Basu's language, in particular, seems to indicate the struggle of a writer groping to find suitable words and terminology in a narrative form for which there was no pre-existing model he could follow. The model which seems to have provided him with some sort of a template was that of the Persian tarikh, not just merely in terms of using Persian vocabulary, but in terms of a more substantive vision and idiom for writing about the rise and fall of a territorial raja.

At their core, all three prose narratives discussed in this chapter give central importance to accounts of past kings and their accomplishments and failures. Underlying this preoccupation is the assumption that the institution of monarchy was indispensable for orderly social existence. Periods of chaos, disorder, and breakdown of the moral and ethical environment are described as *arajak* times, that is, times when there was no king.[32] In the *Pratapaditya Charitra,* the region of Jessore is

described initially as an 'ownerless zamindari' (*be-waris* zamindari) which was deserted, forested, and infested with wild animals. But through the efforts of Bikaramaditya and Basanta Roy, the father and uncle respectively of Raja Pratapaditya, this wilderness was converted into an orderly settlement surrounded by grain stores, markets, public squares, and gardens. Thus, it needed kings to create and preserve a settled society and to keep it orderly.[33]

In Ramram Basu's narrative, the story of the rise and fall of Raja Pratapaditya and his forefathers is squarely grounded within a political and administrative culture. For example, the dramatic rise to power of Pratapaditya's ancestors is charted solely through a series of administrative offices held by them. The 'original' ancestor mentioned by Basu was a certain Ramchandra who worked in the qanungo daftar at Sarkar Saptagram.[34] Subsequently Ramchandra and his sons moved to Gauda and there the latter again acquired jobs in the qanungo daftar at the behest of Sulaiman Karrani, who was then ruler of Bengal. Shibananda, one of the sons of Ramchandra rose to become the head of the qanungo daftar.[35] When, on Sulaiman's death, his son Daud Khan Karrani succeeded him to the throne, the latter elevated his friends (who were nephews of Shibananda) Bikramaditya to the office of 'courtier-in-chief' (*sarvadhyaksha mukhya patra*)[36] and Basanta Roy to the office of diwan of a department of his government. Similarly, the biography of Krishnachandra Roy of Nadia by Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya also traces the lives and careers of the rajas of Nadia primarily in terms of their acquisition of higher and higher administrative offices. Thus Kashinath Roy, the ancestor of Bhabananda Majumdar, held a zamindari in the pargana of Haveli in Bengal—but he lost it through unfortunate circumstances. Kashinath's grandson Bhabananda secured an important position in the administration of the subahdar of Dhaka and acquired the title of Roy-Majumdar.[37] Bhabananda collaborated with Raja Man Singh in the task of suppressing Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore and was rewarded with zamindari rights over pargana Baguan.[38]

Biographies of royal or aristocratic personages, whether in the Sanskrit literary tradition or in various Bengali traditions do not usually trace an individual's career primarily through the lens of a political and administrative culture. The kulagranthas of royalty and the aristocracy, for instance, are also biographies. However, in these traditions, the protagonist's identity and position was made more meaningful in terms of his varna/jati antecedents and his/communal

status and relationships, rather than purely in terms of career trajectories viewed through the perspective of a political/administrative culture. The text composed by Rajiblochan Mukhopadhayaya, for instance, drew considerably upon the Sanskrit genealogy of the rajas of Nadia, the *Kshitishvamsavalicharitam*. Here, unlike the 1801 biography composed by Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya, the antecedents of the Nadia rajas are located in the event celebrated by most kulajis of Bengali Brahmins, that is, the immigration of five ritually pure Brahmins from Kanyakubja to Bengal, and in the identification of Bhattanarayana, one of the 'original' Kanaujiya Brahmins, as the ancestor of the Nadia rajas. It is not until twenty-eight generations had passed since Bhattanarayan's settlement in Bengal that this genealogy began to mention the career trajectories of the Nadia rajas, beginning with Kashinath Roy.[39] The *Kshitishvamsavalicharitam* did indeed refer to the material accession of this family—but it was intertwined with descriptions of their high ritual status and dedication to a varnashrama-based social order and virtues. The biography of Krishnachandra Roy by Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya also contained references to the Bramanical zeal and enthusiasm of these rajas—but the contrast lies in the degree of importance given to this element. Despite professions of Brahmanical enthusiasm, the rajas of Naḍia, as depicted in Rajiblochan's biography, are primarily represented as being preoccupied with climbing up the ladder of political and material wealth and power; their status as Brahmins and self-professed leaders of Bengal's Rarhiya Brahmin samaja in the eighteenth century seems relatively less important, or at best, a supplement to the political and material clout of these magnates. The tarikh tradition by contrast typically charts biographies and careers of rulers, their nobles and principal officials almost entirely through the perspective of a political culture. Other aspects of their lives are either not mentioned or given little importance.

The imprint of the tarikh tradition on the Bengali prose narratives in question is further reinforced by the weight and emphasis placed on a complex tangle of political relationships—particularly in the two charitras of Raja Krishnachandra Roy and Raja Pratapaditya. Thus, these two biographies repeatedly brought to the forefront the issue of political relationships between overlords and subordinates and the pressing issue of political morality. These relationships, grounded in loyalty and trust, were not to be subverted or taken lightly. In Ramram Basu's narrative, Daud Khan Karrani sought to be defiant against the Mughals and came to grief; later, Raja Pratapaditya himself defied

Mughal authority and came to grief; Raja Bikramaditya and Basanta Roy however, collaborated with the paramount sovereign authority of the Mughals and won the zamindari of Jessore.[40] In Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya's text, too, Bhabananda Majumdar was awarded the zamindari of Baguan as a reward for helping the Mughal forces in their campaign against Raja Pratapaditya.[41] Thus, Mughal authority and overlordship were implicitly and explicitly regarded as legitimate and a betrayal of the submission and loyalty due to them almost inevitably resulted in the destruction of the transgressor. In most of these cases the tension between submission to a political overlord vis-à-vis the impulse to defiance was manifest through the concrete example of non-payment of revenue. The examples of Daud Khan Karrani and Pratapaditya referred to above bear eloquent testimony to it. Land revenue records almost symbolize the ultimate victory over a region through the acquisition of the records of its resources. This is eloquently demonstrated in the incident when the Mughal generals sent to subdue Pratapaditya realize that their victory is meaningless unless they can find the revenue records of the region. These were ultimately handed over to them by Raja Bikramaditya and Basanta Roy.[42] In the tarikh tradition too, issues of political fealty and submission are very frequently manifested through the payment of tribute; while the withholding of it signals a lack of political submission and loyalty.

The history of Mughal and nawabi rule in Bengal is replete with instances of ruptured political relationships between zamindars and rajas on the one hand and the Mughal subahdars and the nawabs of Murshidabad on the other. As mentioned in the preceding chapter, the Nadia zamindars in particular are known to have suffered humiliating reprisals at the hands of the Murshidabad nawabs on account of the failure of the former to meet the niabat's revenue demands.[43] Interestingly enough, the 1801 biography of Maharaja Krishnachandra Roy by Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya erases the earlier record of revenue-related troubles vis-à-vis the Murshidabad government. Significantly, this *Charitra* was composed during a period when the zamindars of Nadia (and other Bengal zamindars) were once again severely hard-pressed by revenue problems arising from the revenue demands made upon them by the early colonial regime in Bengal. Thus, in an adroit and strategic move, the 1801 biography steered completely away from references to revenue-related sensitivities of the Nadia rajas vis-à-vis the nawabs of the past as well as the East India Company's regime at the present and instead sought to portray these zamindars as steadfast allies of the

English and key collaborators of the latter in the Plassey conspiracy which had catapulted the Company onto the path of political power in Bengal.

Despite the sanctity attached to the need to accept and maintain the authority of the political overlord, these texts also made it clear that not all forms of political overlordship were legitimate. Mughal overlordship is implicitly regarded as legitimate by both Ramram Basu and Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya. Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar actually discusses the moral and ethical underpinnings of Mughal hegemony in terms of the principles which guided their governance and the examples they set by their personal conduct. Thus the emperor Akbar is depicted as the epitome of every possible kingly virtue—courageous, dignified, capable of appreciating merit and virtue in others, compassionate, the suppressor of evil people, anxious to cater to the needs of his subjects.[44] Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar paid the highest encomium to Akbar when he wrote, 'Since the reign of Sri Bikramaditya, there has been no other emperor in Hindustan who possessed as much virtue as Akbar Shah'.[45] Other Mughal emperors—such as Jehangir, Shah Jehan, and even Aurangzeb—receive overall positive assessments from him.[46] However, royal authority commanded respect and obedience only when it was associated with virtue. As Rajiblochan explains in his work, Nawab Ali Vardi Khan of Bengal was an extremely virtuous ruler who was known for his piety, generosity, and compassion,[47] but the latter's successor Nawab Sirajuddaula seems to have been wantonly cruel, oppressive, and depraved. His misdeeds included the kidnapping of beautiful women, deliberate overturning of passenger-laden boats, and ripping open the abdomens of pregnant women, etc.[48] Interestingly enough, Persian tarikhs produced in late eighteenth century Bengal also portray a similar image of Nawab Sirajuddaula. While sketching out the mounting tensions between the English Company and Nawab Sirajuddaula, the *Maharaja Krishnachandra Roysya Charitram* depicted the former as much more committed to the practice of 'dharma'. Here, the English are shown to be willing to risk a war with the ruler of a country rather than compromise their ethical principles. The principle in question revolved around whether it was moral to betray someone who had sought protection and the English are depicted as steadfast in their determination that it was contrary to 'dharma' to abandon someone who had sought out their protection.[49]

Thus, the three narratives are for the most part powerful and secular narratives of political ambition, power, and calculation, and these are

firmly linked to a specific Mughal political and administrative culture. The explicit and implicit political and territorial imagination at play in these texts accepts as a premise the overarching hegemony of the Mughals as the paramount and sovereign authority. The territorial unit of discussion is variously referred to as the Madhyadesha of Bharatbarsha and as Hindustan. Bengal, the region that receives most attention in these narratives is regarded as a component part of Madhyadesha, Hindustan, and the Mughal empire. There are indeed references to divine providence in these texts and to the power of supernatural forces in shaping earthly developments. But, these are outweighed in the texts by a clear-sighted discussion and analysis of motivations which were in the final analysis impelled by purely temporal considerations. Such considerations prompted the characters depicted in these works to behave in certain ways or, to arrive at certain decisions. In Ramram Basu's biography, for example, the various characters, Daud Khan Karrani, Bikramaditya, Basanta Roy, and Pratapditya are shown weighing various options, making different calculations and then engaging in specific actions. These worldly calculations and decisions were critically important because, as the narratives of Mukhopadhyaya and Basu show, they could cause total devastation or lead to an ascension in one's worldly fortunes.

The cultural environment glimpsed through these narratives reveals a world in which Sanskritic-Brahmanical cultural norms and ideals are certainly espoused by the royal and aristocratic personalities described in them. As Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar explains repeatedly, even the Mughal emperors were either by temperament or, as a matter of tactful policy, inclined to respect the cultural sensitivities of their Hindu subjects. In Mrityunjoy's view, Aurangzeb too was not totally exempt from such behaviour.[50] However, a Persianized courtly culture associated with the political culture of the imperial Mughals was also portrayed as a critically important element in the careers of regional chieftains and their families. Careers of potential rajas, zamindars, and gentry were moulded through the kind of education expected of such people, that is, horseback riding, martial skills, competence at record-keeping, accounting, and the management of revenues, as well as proficiency in Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian.

Proficiency in Persian, in particular, was seen as an indispensable element of courtly and elite culture.[51] It enabled Bhabananda Majumdar of the Nadia Raj family to secure his first important bureaucratic appointment and paved the way for the ascension of the entire lineage's fortunes in the long run.[52] Raja Pratapaditya turned rebel against his

Mughal overlords; but he did not rebel against Mughal courtly culture.[53] Again, the same text shows how a Persian education could bring the son of a fugitive chieftain from a distant province closer to princes of the Mughal royal family, through the concrete example of the sons of Raja Basanta Roy who fled to Delhi when Pratapaditya expelled them from the kingdom of Jessore.[54]

Methodological Strategies

An extremely significant feature noticeable in these texts is that the authors were often aware of multiple competing and divergent accounts of the same event or development which had occurred in the past. Basu for instance referred to the existence of various accounts regarding the fate of Raja Pratapaditya after he had been defeated by the Mughal forces. This feature is especially strong in Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar's *Rajabali*. What is striking in these texts is the effort made by the authors to choose among diverse and sometimes conflicting and competing versions about events that had occurred in the past. As narrators of those events, both Bidyalankar and Basu tried to offer what appeared to them on careful consideration and analysis to be the most correct and credible account. Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar, for instance, stated that different accounts provided different dates of the duration of emperor Humayun's second reign. Some accounts said that Humayun's second reign lasted for ten years; other accounts averred that it lasted for ten months.[55] In this case, Bidyalankar said that he gave due consideration to both accounts, but opted for the latter one because it corresponded with his own calculation that Humayun's second reign could only have lasted for ten months.[56] This search for accuracy in reporting facts and the conscious awareness of the need to carefully weigh different kinds of evidence before arriving at a conclusion which was accurate—these methodologies were often regarded by 'modern' historians in the twentieth century as defining characteristics of the modern and scientific practice of history. Here, very significantly, a 'traditional' Brahmin pundit such as Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar as well as Ramram Basu, a Kayastha from a literate gentry background, were using the same practices to ensure the accuracy of the facts that they reported. Furthermore, these intellectuals made it clear that they did not find all previous accounts equally credible or acceptable. As noted above, the earlier portion of the *Rajabali* followed the Puranic and epic record to provide accounts of ancient kings who had ruled over the Madhyadesha of Bharatvarsha. Yet, there were instances when Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar

quite clearly disbelieved the Puranic authorities. Mrityunjoy stated that according to the Puranas the mass of matter which comprised the earth was supported by an entity described as *ananta* (infinity); his own belief was that the earth was not supported by anything in particular, but rested in space (*shunya*). He cited the Puranic view—but showed his clear skepticism of it by stating briefly, 'this is merely a description' (*se kebal barnana matra).*[57] This can only be seen as a piece of devastating skepticism towards Puranic 'truth' by a scholar who is usually regarded as a somewhat conservative and traditional Brahmin pundit who was well-versed in the shastras.

This awareness of the existence of multiple versions of the same events which had occurred in the past, translated into a tendency to present multiple perspectives about specific events. Ramram Basu, for instance, showed why, in the calculations of Raja Bikramaditya and Basanta Roy, the young Prapataditya was becoming a threat to his own family. They therefore decided to send the prince to the imperial court in Delhi in order to remove him from their own vicinity. Pratapaditya, by contrast, was hurt and offended by this action and his train of thought, as traced by Basu, led to the conclusion that his uncle Basanta Roy probably wanted to deprive him of the chance to inherit his family's estate and thus had conspired to send him away to Delhi.[58] Thus, seen from Pratapditya's perspective, he had a justification for usurping the kingdom from his father and uncle. In the *Krishnachandra Roysya Charitram*, the author also presented a sophisticated exploration of the perspectives held by the English company, nawab Sirajuddaula, and Krishnachandra in the tense period of time leading up to the pre-Plassey conspiracy and the battle itself. In Mukhopadhyaya's depiction, the nawab felt that he had a right to demand that the English pay more customs duties on account of their expanding trade and to demand that they surrender Krishnaballabh who was a fugitive from the nawab's justice. The English eventually conceded that the nawab might be right on some points, but it was contrary to dharma or morality to abandon someone who had sought protection from them. They would rather go to war with Siraj therefore, than give in to the latter's demands. Krishnachandra felt that it was necessary to oppose a ruler such as Siraj whose own monstrous actions were making it impossible for the subjects to live in a moral environment.[59] The mid-eighteenth century verse narrative, the *Maharashtapurana* discussed in Chapter 3 also contains an explanation embodying multiple perspectives for the beginning of the Bargi raids into Bengal. However, the presentation of

such multiple perspectives was to say the least, an extremely unusual feature in eighteenth century historiographical materials.

In terms of narrative stategy, Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya's *Charitra* performed an extremely significant manoeuvre in the way in which it depicted the relationship between Maharaja Krishnachandra and the English in Bengal. As an employee of the college at Fort William and a relative of the rajas of Nadia, this particular pundit may have had an interest in portraying the East India Company's regime as the embodiment of ethical, dharmic government, in representing the relationship between the Nadia rajas and the English as one of closeness and cordiality and most important of all, in trying to show that the hero of his narrative had been instrumental in enabling the undisputed sovereignty of the English in Bengal.

The events leading up to the conflict between Nawab Sirajuddaula (1756–7) and the English have been discussed at length by eighteenth century authors[60] as well as by contemporary historians.[61] Neither group of authors nor the voluminous records of the English East India Company for that period, mention Maharaja Krishnachandra as a key player, or even a participant in the pre-Plassey conspiracy which paved the way for English political ascendancy in Bengal. Yet, in Rajiblochan's text, Krishnachandra is depicted as the principal mediator between the English company on the one hand and the indigenous conspirators on the other. Krishnachandra's motive, according to this narrative, was to support the English because they appeared to be the upholders and adherents of Brahmanical shastric values, while Nawab Sirajuddaula was a cruel, oppressive ruler. The English are described as 'resembling Brihaspati in intelligence, Kubera in wealth and adherence to dharma and Arjuna in bravery'.[62] Even more significantly, in this *Charitra*, Krishnachandra's displeasure against Sirajuddaula is clearly linked to the fact that the latter was a *yavana* (Muslim) ruler. As seen above, Rajiblochan had praised Nawab Ali Vardi Khan as a good and just ruler. But in his elaboration of the considerations that impelled Krishnachandra to turn against the reigning nawab, there is unmistakable indication that the problems of Sirajuddaula's brutal and oppressive reign were being linked to the fact that he was a Muslim king. Thus, the need to remove Sirajuddaula from power was made synonymous with the need to end yavana rule over the region. As a strategy to foreshadow the eventual accession of the English company to the government of Bengal, Rajiblochan's hero Krishnachandra is portrayed as concluding that the only way to rescue the region from the tyranny of Muslim rule was to inaugurate as rulers,

a group of persons, whose 'home was in bilaat [that is, *vilayet*, here denoting England], who were English in jati and who have a kothi in Calcutta'.[63]

As noted in Chapters 1 and 3, the rajas of Nadia often had strained and cool relations with the nawabs of Murshidabad, primarily on account of the inability of the former to meet their revenue obligations. But despite this, neither the *Kshitishvamsavalicharitam* of the early eighteenth century nor the *Annadamangal* of the mid-eighteenth century had articulated any general sentiment of anatgonism or distrust towards the Murshidabad nawabs because the latter were Muslims. Rajiblochan's *Charitra* may have echoed a strain of anti-nawab feeling which occasionally became fused with anti-Muslim feeling in late eighteenth century Bengal.[64] But, it is more likely that the strategy of Rajiblochan in comparing the East India Company's regime in Bengal to a *Ramrajya* and in representing Maharaja Krishnachandra as an eager and willing participant in the anti-Siraj plot was due to the fact that the English were currently the rulers of Bengal and it was judicious to portray them as upholders of ethical values. Here, the past, in the form of Maharaja Krishnachandra's career, was utilized to justify and rationalize the political dominance of the English over Bengal.

The *Raja Pratapaditya Charitra*, *Maharaja Krishnachandra Roysya Charitram*, and the *Rajabali*: between the 'Old' and the 'New'

The *Pratapaditya Charitra* in particular has been hailed as 'an exercise in modern, rationalist historiography' by Ranajit Guha and one which mirrored the 'western model of historiography'.[65] The historiographic modernity of this narrative is seen to lie in its 'insistence on continuity and completeness'.[66] Yet, as I have pointed out earlier, narrative continuity was one of the features of the chronicle tradition in particular. The next chapter which deals with Persian tarikhs points out that these texts were also characterized by a concern to maintain a narrative continuity as they provided chronological accounts of kings. The remark on 'completeness' refers to the fact that the *Pratapaditya Charitra* achieved what Hayden White calls narrative closure.[67] This account centralized the life and career of Pratapaditya and ended with the political destruction and physical death of this raja, the hero of the text. It is true that chronicle literature, such as the *Rajabali* of Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar or the kulagranthas discussed in Chapter 1 were indeed

'open-ended'. But typically, the charitra/biography genre in which the narratives of both Ramram Basu and Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya can be located, were marked by the presence in them of 'completeness' in the sense that the thread of the narrative conclusively ended with the termination of the life, prosperity, and accomplishments of the principal protagonist. It thus seems difficult to identify these two features as harbingers of a historiographic modernity to Ramram Basu's narrative. Since Guha's discussion does not indicate what specifically was meant by the reference to the 'western model of historical writing' it is difficult to engage substantively with this comment. But if the rational, factual character of Ramram Basu's work—albeit its occasional digressions into the realm of the fantastic—is being referred to as a 'new' historiographic feature in pre-modern Indian/Bengali historiography, then this too is hard to accommodate into the historiographic climate of early modern India generally as well as Bengal. As the previous chapters of this book, as well as the work of Rao-Shulman-Subrahmanyam, Sumit Guha and others have established, pre-modern Indian historiography cannot be characterized as lacking in factuality. Its presence, as we have noted, was often accompanied by the coexistence of elements of the fantastic and the miraculous. The degree to which factual elements were emphasized vis-à-vis the fabulous depended on the form and genre of the specific narrative in question. As a discussion of Ramram Basu's career above indicates, his close association with a number of Englishmen, particularly with William Carey, could perhaps have provided him with a degree of familiarity with 'western models of history writing'. But there is little evidence of it either in the *Pratapaditya Charitra* or in the few other original compositions of Ramram Basu.[68]

The historiographic 'newness' or otherwise of the three prose narratives which are the main focus of this chapter can be further elaborated upon by discussing the feature of intertextuality in them. By intertextuality, I refer to the creation of a deliberate and self-conscious intellectual context through references to pre-existing narratives. As the discussion above has shown, Sanskritic/Puranic literary influences constitute the most visible influence in Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya's biography of Maharaja Krishnachandra Roy. This author did not mention it, but his brief discussion of Krishnachandra Roy's ancestors was very likely based on the Sanskrit *Kshitishvamsavalicharitam*.

This genealogy was both a typical kulagrantha of an eminent Brahman family; simultaneously it also contained features reminiscent of the political/administrative culture of tarikh literature to the

extent that it gave a fair amount of weight to discussing the upward climb of Krishnachandra Roy's ancestors along the ladder of Mughal administrative offices. However, the similarity of this feature was unacknowledged by Mukhopadhyaya; and its presence in this *Charitra* is implicit and far from obvious. It needs to be pointed out that Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya was also strongly averse to acknowledging the existence and influence upon his work of a vigorous Bengali vernacular tradition. This tradition was embodied by the extremely popular *Annadamangalakavya* composed by Bharatchandra Roy merely half a century or so ago, under the patronage of the very same raja who served as the hero of his text. In his *Charitra* of 1802, Rajiblochan referred to the Bidya-Sundar story; he also alluded to the episode regarding the arrival of the goddess Annada to the residence of the rajas of Nadia, in a boat ferried by a boatman named Ishvari Patni. Both episodes figure importantly in the *Annadamangala*; both accounts were also well-known in contemporary Bengal. Yet Rajiblochan remained silent about Bharatchandra Roy's kavya. He attributed the Bidya-Sundar story to the Sanskrit work entitled the *Chaurapanchashika*.[69] Rajiblochan Mukhopadhayaya, a Brahmin pundit proficient in the Sanskrit shastras was clearly uninterested in stepping out of the Sanskritic literary tradition.

In contrast to Mukhopadhyaya, both Ramram Basu and Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar explicitly acknowledged their indebtedness to narratives from the Sanskrit and Persian literary traditions as well as to a variety of popular traditions—oral traditions as well as written ones—as a large pool of authorities on which they based their own accounts. Of these two authors, Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar's *Rajabali* stands out particularly as the specimen of a narrative in which multiple literary cultures were not merely present, but in which the author actually makes explicit references to them.

As referred to above, Bidyalankar used the Puranic corpus, epics such as the Mahabharata (he collectively described both as *puranetihasa*)[70] as well as narratives from the classical Sanskrit literary tradition to reconstruct his own account of successive kings who ruled prior to the conquests of the yavanas. From the latter category, he made specific mention of the *Vikramacharitra* and the *Batris Simhasana* associated with Bhojaraja.[71] The explicit reference to and use of the Puranic and Sanskrit literary texts by Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar created a common ground of sorts between him and Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya. However, what distinguished the former from the latter was his

willingness to draw upon as many literary and intellectual traditions as possible without reservations.

Both Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar and Ramram Basu disclosed their dependence on the Persian tarikh tradition for the construction of the accounts they presented in their texts. Basu very explicitly positioned his work in the context of several pre-existing Persian works which he claimed had been composed about Raja Pratapaditya (*samprati e deshe Pratapaditya name ek raja hoia chilen tahar bibaran kinchit parsya bhashae granthita ache*)[72]—but unfortunately does not give us the names of these texts or other details regarding them. Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar referred to a large corpus of Indo-Islamic narratives which he clearly appeared to have used to construct his account of Turkish, Afghan, and Mughal rulers who ruled from Delhi.[73] But his most expansive references to a Persian tarikh tradition occurred in relation to the Mughal emperors, especially Akbar.[74] He also referred to various intellectuals associated with the court of Akbar. A group which he described as 'maulanas' included eminent persons like Faizi and Abul Fazl;[75] the second group consisting of 'pundits' included persons of the stature of Mammatha Bhatta.[76] Bidyalankar also revealed his familiarity with the fact that during Akbar's reign and particularly at his initiative, a large project involving the translation into Persian of many Sanskrit shastras had been launched.[77] Bidyalankar reported that Akbar's personal interest in Sanskrit scholarship led him to send Faizi in disguise to Benares for the express purpose of finding out more about Sanskrit learning. Thus, in Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar's perspective, the Persian literary and intellectual tradition formed one among several other literary traditions prevalent in India during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and he moreover signalled his clear understanding of the interaction between the Persian and Sanskrit traditions at the encouragement of the Mughal emperors.

Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar's *Rajabali* was also generically descended from an ancient and medieval tradition of royal chronicles most commonly known as *Rajatarangini* or *Rajtaranga* and *Rajabali*. By far the best-known among works of this genre was Kalhana's celebrated chronicle of the kings of Kashmir composed in the twelfth century. Kalhana drew upon a pre-existing regional tradition to offer this connected account of monarchs.[78] Following Kalhana, a cluster of at least three more works, with similar titles, was composed by successive authors who collectively carried the narrative of Kashmir's kings down till Akbar's conquest of the region in 1586.[79] As noted earlier in the

Introduction, it is conventional for pre-modern historiographic narratives in Sanskrit or in South Asian vernaculars to be treated separately as 'Hindu' historical writing, while Persian narratives are treated in isolation from the former as specimens of 'Islamic' historiography. Yet, as Stein points out, the Persian tarikhs of Kashmir can, to some extent, be regarded as a continuation of the endeavours of Kalhana and his pundit successors. An appropriate example of this is comprised by the tarikh of Haidar Malik Cadura completed in 1617 during the twelfth year of Jehangir's reign.[80]

A similar tradition of royal chronicles had existed and circulated in Bengal for several centuries prior to the narrative of kings composed by Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar at the order of the East India Company in 1808. A Sanskrit chronicle of kings, known as the *Rajabali* or the *Rajtaranga*, currently in the possession of the Dhaka University Library (hereafter referred to as the Dhaka *Rajabali*)[81] pushes back the currency of a *Rajabali* tradition in Bengal to possibly the sixteenth century and maybe earlier.[82] Both the Dhaka *Rajabali* and the Fort William College *Rajabali* mentioned Puranic kings; both chronicles listed the kings of Bengal, beginning with King Adisura (of kulagrantha fame, discussed in Chapter 2) and his descendants, the Sena kings who are represented as kings of both Bengal and Delhi and the Rajput Chauhan kings of Delhi, particularly, Prithu Rai. The Dhaka *Rajabali*, although a complete work in itself, was a much shorter and abridged version of the 1808 chronicle. Among other things, the accounts of Muslim kings had been significantly condensed in the former. The Dhaka *Rajabali* ended with the conquest of Bengal by the yavana who is called 'Qutubuddi'. R.C. Majumdar was of the opinion that the Dhaka *Rajabali* may have been a condensed version of a longer Sanskrit *Rajabali* which may have functioned as its parent text.[83] Majumdar did not provide any evidence to support this speculation, but it is not unlikely that other versions, even older versions of the *Rajabali*, may well have circulated in Bengal, even if we do not pin our hopes on a definitive parent-text of this narrative. Indeed, the surmise regarding a generic tradition (with overall similarities, but with differences in detail) of *Rajabalis* in Bengal is reinforced by the reference to yet another Sanskrit *Rajabali* by Umesh Chandra Gupta in the first volume of his work entitled the *Jati Tattva Baridhi*. The *Rajabali* mentioned by Gupta was practically identical to the Dhaka *Rajabali* and was known in the Muktagacha region of Eastern Bengal around the later part of the nineteenth century. It is significant that the manuscript of the Dhaka *Rajabali* had also been discovered

in Muktagacha.[84] We have noted above how an old, Indian/Kashmiri chronicle tradition about kings could blend with Persian tarikhs which were also typically structured around reigns of kings. In the case of Bengal, we have a somewhat similar phenomenon in the fact that the account of Bengal's kings contained in Abul Fazl's *Ain-i-Akbari* are similar to accounts of the same in both the Dhaka/Muktagacha and the Fort William College *Rajabalis*.

Popular literary traditions were also acknowledged to be important repositories of information about past kings and their accomplishments in the views of both Ramram Basu and Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar. Basu referred to a strong tradition of anecdotes and reminiscences about Raja Pratapaditya which he had utilized to compose his *Charitra*. In his case these anecdotes and stories had been handed down from generation to generation among Bangaja Kayastha families in Bengal.[85] These anecdotes and stories may well have been connected to the kulagrantha tradition which, as seen in Chapter 1, tended to be simultaneously oral as well as textual. Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar acknowledged his indebtedness to the work of Chand Bardai, whom he called 'Chandra bhat' for an account of Prithviraj Chauhan and other Rajput kings.[86] For popular stories regarding Akbar, he referred to well-known poets and storytellers such as Raja Birbal and Ganga who were associated with that monarch's court.[87] Mrityunjoy also mentioned what appeared to be a mass of anecdotes about Akbar which emphasized the latter's religiosity and association with Hinduism. One such story recounted how Akbar had been a Hindu Brahmachari in a previous life and Raja Birbal had been his faithful disciple.[88] Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar quite clearly considered these stories and anecdotes about the emperor to be very much a part of the living culture of his time. He also acknowledged that Akbar's governmental and administrative innovations continued to constitute the political legacy of his own time.[89] Ramram Basu and Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar, both pioneer prose writers, however, made it clear that oral testimony and stories were to be relied upon only when they came from authoritative and reliable sources.

The prose narratives of kings explored in this chapter are therefore remarkable in terms of the multiple literary, cultural, and historiographical traditions whose influences they embodied. Most importantly they showcase, albeit unevenly, the imprint of a Persianate literary and historiographic culture. The imprint of the Puranic/Sanskritic tradition is not unexpected. The identifiable presence of features derived from a Persianate tradition which were

simultaneously present in these texts is much more remarkable. This is because the presence—or even the possibility—of Persianate elements in narratives, whose structure and nomenclature (*Rajabali*/charitra) connected them to ancient Sanskritic genres, is usually neither recognized nor acknowledged. Thus, the Fort William College prose texts authored by the three Bengali scholars recruited by William Carey have most typically been characterized as Puranic texts.[90] Yet, the fascinating layering of multiple literary and historiographic traditions in them better qualifies them to be seen as hybrid narratives which mirrored the polyglot cultural environment of seventeenth and eighteenth century South Asia at a general level and Bengal at a more particular level.[91] The element of cultural hybridity, for instance, is beautifully illustrated in the 1808 *Rajabali* in the manner in which Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar referred to dates and chronological eras in his magisterial chronicle of kings. He simultaneously used chronology and calendrical systems which included the Puranic and various Indic systems (for example, the Sakabda, the Vikrama era, the Bengal *san*, and others) as well as the Islamic era or Hijra and the Christian era.[92]

The tendency of not recognizing the Persianate elements in the three texts studied here derives from the conventional proclivity to characterize the cultural and intellectual worlds of the Hindu and Muslim literati and scholars as separate and unconnected domains. Ramram Basu was a Persian-proficient munshi. The imprint of Persianate—actually tarikh-like features—in the *Pratapaditya Charitra* is thus not surprising. But this feature too has gone largely unnoticed in a text which is otherwise extremely well known. The heavy use of Persian vocabulary—harkening back to the 'lexical influence' posited by Suniti Kumar Chatterji—was noticed by scholars such as Ramgati Nyayaratna and Sushil Kumar De and it was condemned severely by them. According to De, Ramram Basu's prose style was, 'one of the worst specimens of Bengali prose writing even for that period'.[93]

The Persianate strand in Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar's work is especially worthy of comment because the general assumption has been that a pundit schooled in the Sanskrit shastras was bound to be unfamiliar with it.[94] The exercise in attempting to track a genealogy of the *Rajabali* tradition in Bengal since the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries confirms that an intermingling of Puranic/Sanskritic and Persianate traditions in such generic chronicles of kings had been in operation long before Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar's time. This was a phenomenon which

Sanskrit-proficient Brahmin pundits were well aware of. Thus, when commissioned to produce a text book for the young sahib students of the Fort William College, Mrityunjoy wrote 'an account that was in circulation among the Brahmin literati and their landowning patrons'[95] for at least a couple of centuries before his time. Even if all Bengali scholars and intellectuals were not equally open or receptive to it, the examples of Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar and Ramram Basu in this chapter and the cases of Bharatchandra Roy and Gangaram in the previous one, indicate its presence in a variety of literary and historiographic works produced in early modern Bengal.

Notes

1. The prose texts discussed in this chapter, that is, Ramram Basu, *Raja Pratapaditya Charitra*, Searampore, 1801; Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya, *Maharaja Krishnachandra Roysya Charitram*, Searampore, 1805; and Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar, *Rajabali*, Searampore, 1808, illustrate the importance of the king as a symbol of his kingdom and his subject community. Cynthia Talbot, *Pre-Colonial India in Practice: Society, Region and Identity in Medieval Andhra*, New Delhi, 2001, pp. 124–215, has an excellent discussion on the significance of kings in historical memories of communities.

2. Wlad Godzich and Jeffrey Kittay, *The Emergence of Prose: An Essay in Prosaics*, Minneapolis, 1987.

3. Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson, in *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*, Stanford, 1990, pp. 281–2.

4. Gabrielle M. Spiegel, *Romancing the Past: The Rise of Vernacular Prose Historiography in Thirteenth Century France*, Berkeley, 1993, p. 66.

5. Sisir Kumar Das, *Gadya O Padyer Dvandva*, Calcutta, 1989, p. 21; Gholam Murshed, *Kalantare Bangla Gadya: Oupanibeshik Amale Gadyer Rupantar,* 1399 BS, Calcutta.

6. There is a large literature on the development of Bengali prose. Some of the best known among these are: Dinesh Chandra Sen, *Bengali Prose Style*, Calcutta, 1921; Sukumar Sen, *Bangla Sahitye Gadya*, Calcutta, 1949 (rpt); Sajanikanta Das, *Bangla Gadya Sahityer Itihasa*, Calcutta, 1962; Sushil Kumar De, *Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, Calcutta, 1962; Sisir Kumar Das, *Early Bengali Prose: Carey to Vidyasagar*, Calcutta, 1966; Sisir Kumar Das, *Sahibs and Munshis: An Account of the College at Fort William*, New Delhi, 1978.

7. David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773–1835*, Berkeley, 1969, p. 45.

8. See note 1, this chapter.

9. Sisir Kumar Das, 'Bengali Linguistic Historiography' in D.P. Chattopadhyaya (ed.), *History and Society: Essays in Honour of Professor Nihar Ranjan Ray*, Calcutta, 1978, pp. 373–89.

10. Shibratan Mitra, *Types of Early Bengali Prose*, Calcutta, 1922; Suniti Kumar Chatterji and P. Sen, *Manoel da Assumpcan's Bengali Grammar*, Calcutta, 1933; Panchanan Mandal, *Punthi Parichay*, Calcutta, 1951–63; Anisuzzaman (ed.), *Factory Correspondence and Other Bengali Documents in the India Office Library and Records*, London, 1981; Murshed, *Kalantare Bangla Gadya*, pp. 13–21.

11. Murshed, *Kalantare Bangla Gadya*, p. 25.

12. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, *Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*, 2002 (rpt), New Delhi, pp. 202–6; Sukumar Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*, vol. 1, pp. 81–2, vol. 2, p. 2.

13. Haraprasad Shastri, *Haraprasad Rachanabali*, Suniti Kumar Chattopadhyaya, (ed.), 2 vols, Calcutta, 1956, this reference: vol. 1, p. 199.

14. Murshed, *Kalantare Bangla Gadya*, pp. 29–30.

15. Ibid., p. 117.

16. S. Chatterji, *Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*, pp. 202–6; S. Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihas*, vol. 1, pp. 81–2, vol. 2, p. 2; Sir Jadunath Sarkar (ed.), *History of Bengal: Muslim Period, 1200–1757*, p. 224.

17. S. Chatterji, *Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*, pp. 201–2.

18. Ibid., p. 206.

19. The literature on this topic is voluminous; some representative examples include Bernard Cohn, 'The Census, Social Structure and Objectification in South Asia', in Bernard Cohn, *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays*, New Delhi, 1978, pp. 224–54; Ronald Inden, *Imagining India*, Oxford, 1990; Lata Mani, *Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India*, Berkeley, 1998; Eugene Irschick, *Dialogue and History: Constructing South India, 1795–1895*, Berkeley, 1994; C.A. Bayly, *Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India, 1780–1870*, Cambridge; Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, Berkeley, 1997; Phillip Wagoner, 'Pre-Colonial Intellectuals and the Formation of

Colonial Knowledge', *Comparative Studies in Society and History,* vol. 45, no. 4, 2003, pp. 783–814.

20. Brojendranath Bandyopadhyaya, *Fort William Colleger Pandit*, 1366 BS, Calcutta, pp. 28–34.

21. Sunil Kumar Chattopadhyaya, *Munshi Ramram Basu*, Calcutta, 1983, pp. 1–2.

22. Ibid., pp. 2–3.

23. Ibid.

24. Ramram Basu, *Lipimala*, Searampore, 1802.

25. Shamita Sinha, *Pandits in a Changing Environment*, p. 92.

26. Sinha, *Pandits,* p. 92.

27. Ibid., p. 93.

28. *Rajabali,* pp. 3–4.

29. Ibid., p. 10.

30. *Krishnachandra Charitram,* pp. 312–13, 319.

31. For for example, Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, pp. 76–94; Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World History*, New York, 2002; Manu Goswami, *Producing India:From Colonial Economy to National Space*, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 155–7.

32. *Pratapaditya Charitra,* pp. 17–18.

33. Ibid.

34. Ibid., p. 4.

35. Ibid., p. 9.

36. Ibid., p. 12.

37. *Krishnachandra Charitra,* pp. 308–10.

38. Ibid., p. 314.

39. See *Kshitishvamsavalicharitam,* W. Pertsch (ed. and tr.), in Mohit Roy (ed.), *Kshitishvamshavalicharit,* pp. 197–235.

40. *Pratapaditya Charitra,* pp. 14–43, 129–56.

41. *Krishnachandra Charitra,* pp. 309–10.

42. *Pratapaditya Charitra,* pp. 32–41.

43. For example, Pertsch, *Kshitish,* p. 15.

44. *Rajabali,* pp. 194–5.

45. Ibid., pp. 194–5.

46. Ibid., pp. 198–214.

47. *Krishnachandra Charitra,* p. 322.

48. Ibid., pp. 322–3.

49. Ibid., pp. 335–6.

50. *Rajabali,* pp. 214–21.

51. *Pratapaditya Charitra*, p. 50.

52. Pertsch, *Kshitish*, p. 9.

53. *Pratapaditya Charitra*, pp. 60–3.

54. Ibid., p. 141.

55. *Rajabali*, p. 190.

56. Ibid., p. 190.

57. Ibid., p. 4.

58. *Pratapaditya Charitra*, pp. 50–9.

59. *Krisihnachandra Charitra*, pp. 329–38.

60. For instance, by many of the Persian chroniclers whose work is discussed in the following chapter as well as by authors like Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar, in his *Rajabali*.

61. Examples would include Sir Jadunath Sarkar (ed.), *History of Bengal*; Brijen K. Gupta, *Sirajuddaula and the East India Company*, Leiden, 1962; C.A. Bayly, *Indian Society and the Making of the British Empire*, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 48–55; Chatterjee, *Merchants, Politics and Society in Early Modern India: Bihar*, pp. 101–12; Sushil Chaudhury, 'Sirajuddaulah, the English Company and the British Conquest of Bengal—a Reappraisal', *Indian Historical Review*, vol. 13, no. 2, July 1986–January 1987, pp. 111–34.

62. *Krishnachandra Charitra*, p. 330.

63. Ibid., p. 330.

64. This point needs much greater investigation. However, the turbulence experienced in mid-eighteenth century Bengal, for example, the Bargi raids, the ever-intensifying financial demands of the nawab's government for the purpose of resisting the Bargis, and many other factors may have combined to produce a strand of anti-nawab/anti-Muslim rule sentiment among certain segments of Bengal's population. Brijen Gupta, *Sirajuddaulah and the East India Company*, pp. 40–1, refers to such sentiments voiced by English factors. However, Rajat Kanta Ray, *Palashir Sharayantra O se Kaler Samaj*, Calcutta, 1994, points out that there was no self-consciously Hindu hostility to Muslim rule.

65. R. Guha, *History at the Limits of World History*, pp. 10–11.

66. Ibid., p. 11.

67. Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, Baltimore, 1990, pp. 1–25.

68. See Ramram Basu's *Lipimala*, also his composition in praise of Christ, see, Chattopadhyaya, *Munshi Ramram Basu*, p. 11.

69. *Krishnachandra Charitra*, p. 311.

70. *Rajabali*, pp. 28–9.

71. *Rajabali*, p. 70. Mrityunjoy had also translated these stories into Bengali for use as a textbook at the Fort William College, see pp. 25–70.

72. *Pratapaditya Charitra*, pp. 3–4. Ranajit Guha is of the view that Ramram Basu sought to distance his work from the Persian chronicle tradition (R. Guha, *History at the Limits of World History*, p. 11). In my reading, Basu referred to the fact that there were pre-existing Persian accounts about Pratapaditya; Basu also mentioned the fact that these accounts were not comprehensive. However, I do not interpret this to understand that Ramram Basu was trying to distance himself from the Persian chronicle tradition. Ramram Basu's formal education which included Persian, the tradition of Persian proficiency in his family, his employment as Persian tutor to W. Chambers, the heavy overlay of Persian words in his biography of Pratapaditya plus the presence of features in it that are reminiscent of tarikh literature—collectively, these points make it difficult to think that he would be trying to separate himself from the Persianate chronicle tradition.

73. *Rajabali*, p. 113.

74. Ibid., p. 195.

75. Ibid., p. 195.

76. Ibid., p. 190.

77. Ibid., p. 191.

78. *Kalhana's Rajatarangini*, M.A. Stein (ed. and tr.), 2 vols, with an Introduction, commentary and appendices by M.A. Stein, Delhi, 1979, vol. 1, p. 4.

79. *Kalhana's Rajatarangini*, vol. 2, p. 373; see also, *Kings of Kashmira*, Jogesh Chandra Datta (tr.), Delhi, 1990, vol. 1, pp. i–iii.

80. *Rajatarangini*, vol. 2, p. 374. See also Ahmad Aziz, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment*, Oxford, 1964, pp. 222–34, for a discussion of the interaction between the Sanskrit and Persianate literary traditions.

81. 'Rajabali', Dhaka University Library manuscript, Accession no.: K577A.

82. R.C. Majumdar, 'Samskrita Rajabali Grantha', *Sahitya Parishat Patrika*, vol. 46, no. 4, 1346 BS, pp. 233–9; this reference is to p. 236.

83. Majumdar, 'Samskrita Rajabali Grantha', p. 238.

84. Ibid., p. 239.

85. *Pratapaditya Charitra*, p. 4.

86. *Rajabali*, p. 96.

87. Ibid., pp. 193–4.

88. Ibid., pp. 195–6.

89. Ibid., pp. 192–3.

90. For example, Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India*, pp. 32–3; Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, pp. 77–85; Manu Goswami, *Producing India*, pp. 154–64.

91. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Recovering Babel: Polyglot Histories from the Eighteenth Century Tamil Country', in Daud Ali (ed.), *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, New Delhi, 1999, pp. 280–321; and Sumit Guha, 'Transitions and Translations: Regional Power and Vernacular Identity in the Dakhan, 1500–1800', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2004, pp. 23–31, illustrate the diversity of literary cultures in South Asia and the interactions among them during the early modern period.

92. *Rajabali*, pp. 3, 7, 10–16.

93. De, *Bengali Literature in the Nineteenth Century*, p. 154.

94. This is how Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar's formal scholarly training has been characterized in *Mrityunjoy Granthabali*, Brojendranath Bandyopadhyaya (ed.), Calcutta, 1939, pp. iii–iv. This characterization has been uncritically accepted by David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance*, Berkeley, 1969, p. 124; Shamita Sinha, *Pundits in a Changing Environment*, Calcutta, 1993, p. 92; and S.K. Chattopadhyaya, *Munshi Ramram Basu*.

95. Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, pp. 77–8.

5

Saving the Mughal Legacy
The Tarikhs of the Nawabi World

This chapter veers away from a discussion of narratives composed in Bengali to highlight a cluster of Persian texts which were composed in Bengal during the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The Persian works discussed here belong to the tarikh tradition associated in the South Asian subcontinent with Indo-Islamic political power and its related culture. The intellectual and historical antecedents of the tarikh tradition, as well as its characteristic features, have already been discussed in Chapter 1. This chapter explores the substance and content of these narratives and the social, cultural, and political background of their composers. The historiographic function performed by these texts is also discussed here.

The Bengal Tarikhs and their Social Context

The texts studied here were composed by the nobility and officials of the Mughal successor state of Bengal with its capital at Murshidabad. This was very much in line with the tradition of Indo-Islamic historiography, which was characterized by the production of narrative histories and political commentaries by government officials who were well-informed about governmental institutions and their workings. The antecedents of the nawabi bureaucracy who authored the eighteenth century tarikhs can be traced to the establishment of Mughal rule in eastern India in the late sixteenth century, and more recently to the development of a Mughal successor state in the region at the turn of the eighteenth century. Despite the effective political break from the parent Mughal

system, as far as actual administrative subordination was concerned, the nawabs of this new realm, and the ruling class that developed here, quite deliberately preserved the political culture and social norms associated with the former. The nawabs used the distribution of jagirs to mansabdars in eastern India as a means to create a ruling class with territorial roots whose loyalty could be counted upon.[1]

Under the mansabdari hierarchy there existed a variety of administrative positions staffed by people who have been described by John F. Richards as the 'technicians' of the state—that is, a skilled professional corps of lower and mid-level officials who served in diverse capacities as revenue officials, news writers, subordinate military commanders, and managers of princely or aristocratic households, and the like. Even below this pool of 'technical' officials were a number of humbler but no less important administrative positions like that of the qanungo, the keeper of revenue accounts at the pargana level, and others.[2] These were people without whose careful record-keeping and handling of the daily administration, no government could function.

Mughal rule had brought in its train to Bengal a considerable number of people from northern India. Most of them were associated with Mughal provincial administration in the region. Regional professional and scribal families also played predominant roles in these middle and lower-level administrative posts. Many of them had a history of service under Muslim rulers long predating the Mughal conquest. The skills, which had rendered their service invaluable in the eyes of the Bengal sultans, now served them well as far as Mughal administration and subsequently the Murshidabad niabat were concerned. Literate, gentry families in Bengal—particularly the Bengali Baidyas, Kayasthas, and also Brahmans—thus played extremely important roles in manning middle and lower-level bureaucratic offices. The existence of these social and professional groups has been referred to earlier in Chapters 1, 2, and 3.

The highest bureaucrats—those holding mansabdari ranks—constituted the most important segment of the social aristocracy both in the Mughal empire and in the breakaway nawabi state of Bengal. They played leading roles in court rituals and ceremonies, enjoyed close personal interaction with the rulers, and were expected to adhere to the aristocratic or courtly culture of the times. Lower-ranking mansabdars were usually not regarded as being in the same category professionally as the highest ones. But they, together with other mid-level officials,

often comprised an influential group of people who possessed strong connections with eminent nobles, holding the highest mansabdari ranks, and with powerful personalities within ruling circles. They also shared the same courtly culture that characterized the elite, and formed part of the lesser nobility or the outer rim of the aristocratic circle, a status that derived originally from their familial and social connections. Many of the authors of the Persian histories discussed here fit very well into this category.[3] There were also many highly-placed Hindu families which possessed generations of association with the Mughal and nawabi governments and enjoyed close proximity to the ruler and the most powerful nobles. A good example is provided by the family of Maharaja Kalyan Singh Ashiq, author of the *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh* (1812).[4] The close association enjoyed by these personalities with rulers and ruling circles through professional connections was reinforced often by close, familial connections. Women of powerful households also played critical roles in maintaining and fostering familial ties which ultimately existed in close tandem with professional linkages.[5] As will be seen subsequently, these kinds of professional, social, and familial ties with circles of political power enabled these personalities to compose their works and, in fact, shaped the content and methodologies of these tarikhs.There also developed as a subset of Mughal elite culture, a specific bureaucratic culture which was shared by imperial officials as well as officials in Mughal successor states such as Bengal and Bihar. This bureaucratic culture can be traced back to those mansabdars who came from mansabdari lineages (being the sons and grandsons of former mansabdars) and were called *khanazads*. John F. Richards describes the prevailing culture among the upper reaches of the Mughal bureaucracy, or 'the proper behaviour and attitude of the Mughal nobles or amirs', as 'khanazadgi', which he, in turn, defines as 'devoted, familial hereditary service to the emperor'. Significantly enough, by the later seventeenth century, this culture of khanazadgi had filtered down to the middle-level non-mansabdari officer corps of the empire as well to become an important element in creating what must be described as a bureaucratic *esprit de corps*. The writings of Mirza Nathan and Bhimsen Burhanpuri, two Mughal officials, eloquently exemplify this cult of devotion. Even more significant is the fact that other professional groups—such as artists, for example—appropriated this term and its ethos and described themselves as servants of the empire.[6] This tradition of committed service ran parallel to and had links with the cult of devotion to the

physical person of the emperor (discussed in Chapter 1) which had developed among higher and mid-level imperial officials and even among provincial aristocrats.

By the eighteenth century this ethos was quite strongly prevalent among the holders of some of the most subordinate administrative positions. Several officials who held such positions also produced detailed administrative treatises during the same period when many of the Bengal tarikhs were composed. I draw the line at facilely assigning the label 'history' to these very technical administrative treatises. However, I discuss a couple of such treatises in this chapter as being representative of a genre of documentary writings which were compiled at this time, since these provide a significant complement to some of the most important agendas manifest in the Persian tarikhs. Atmaram, the author of one (and perhaps both) of the administrative treatises used here, held the office of qanungo of pargana Sherghatty in Bihar during the middle decades of the eighteenth century. Atmaram probably did not use the term 'khanazad' to describe himself or the earlier generations of his family. But he held an office which he claimed had been successively held by his ancestors for one hundred and forty two years. His job, therefore, had become an indispensable part of a personal heritage.[7]

Substance, Purpose, and Methodology of the Bengal Tarikhs

A common feature shared by the Bengal tarikhs studied here is that they gave central importance to the reigns of the autonomous nawabs of Bengal, starting with Murshid Quli Khan and ending with the reign of Nawab Sirauddaula in 1757. Other tarikhs positioned their narratives against a wider backdrop. Thus, Ghulam Hussain Khan Tabatabai located his narrative about developments in Bengal in relation to major political events in the Mughal empire since the death of Aurangzeb in 1707.[8] Ghulam Hussain Salim, author of the *Riyaz-us-Salatin*, presented his account of the autonomous nawabs of Bengal as the last phase in a much longer story of Muslim rule in Bengal. Ghulam Hussain Salim also provided a brief overview of Hindu rulers who ruled Bengal prior to Bakhtiyar Khalji's occupation.

For many of the authors of these tarikhs, the purpose of composing these narratives about the reigns of past rulers was that these events needed to be recorded for posterity. As Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai

wrote, '...his intention [in writing] was...to furnish to some intelligent man the means of giving the public at some distant time hereafter, an idea of preceding reigns...'[9] The reasons why posterity needed to know about the reigns of past kings was clear. First, the historical record allowed people a deeper insight into God's work on earth since all human affairs were ultimately '...the most glorious part of the creator's performance'.[10] Most tarikh writers agreed that their principal subject was the reigns of monarchs of the past. This was so because monarchs held power only by the grace of God and these monarchs were responsible for the management of the world and of the affairs of human beings entrusted to their care. Thus, an exploration of the accomplishments and deeds of kings was essentially an exploration of the condition of entire societies which were subject to the former.[11] Finally, narratives of past reigns held immense value for the present because they served as educational and moral examples.[12]

In terms of methodology, the men who authored these Persian tarikhs, first and foremost, sought to establish their connection to the classic traditions of Indo-Persian and Persian historiography. This endeavour was conscious and deliberate and it allowed the authors of the Bengal tarikhs a legitimacy and prestige associated with following an intellectual and cultural precedent which had existed for centuries. Maulavi Abdus Salam, the translator-cum-editor of the *Riyaz* wrote that while Ghulam Hussain Salim did not clearly refer to all the sources of history, he was convinced that the internal evidence of the text suggested that its author was familiar with and had consulted what had become 'standard historical works' for Mughal literati. It is true that sometimes Ghulam Hussain Salim made enigmatic references to books whose titles he did not divulge; sometimes he also referred to books whose whereabouts were not known to scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For the most part though, Abdus Salam was convinced that Ghulam Hussain Salim followed Persian historiographical works such as the *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri* and Ziauddin Barani's *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* for the history of Bengal under its pre-Mughal Muslim sultans. For events in Bengal following the Mughal conquest of the region, Ghulam Hussain Salim probably depended on classics such as the *Ain-i-Akbari* of Abul Fazl, the *Tuzuk-i-Jehangiri* of emperor Jehangir, the *Padshahnama* of Abdul Hamid Lahori, the *Ma'asir-i-Alamgiri*, and many others.[13] Ghulam Hussain Salim also reveals in his writing that he was familiar with the *Shahnama* and with other landmark works of the Persian literary tradition such as the *Masnavi* of Rumi. Ghulam

Hussain Salim's methodology set a precedent which was followed several decades later by his student Abdul Karim, and then by Abdul Karim's student Ilahi Baksh.[14] The *Siyar-ul-Mutakhirin* too was based in all likelihood on some earlier tarikhs, although Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai never makes this explicit. Allusions to personalities and events from Persian and Islamic history and cultural traditions also abounded in the Bengal tarikhs. Ghulam Hussain Salim compared his patron, an Englishman named George Udny, to Hatim (an Arab prince of ancient times) and Naushirwan (an ancient Iranian king reputed in particular for his dispensation of justice);[15] Salimullah Munshi, in his *Tarikh-i-Bangla,* called emperor Aurangzeb a 'second Jemshed'.[16] In the *Riyaz*, the author displayed his close affiliation to Islamic intellectual traditions by integrating India and Bengal ethnographically and cosmologically with an Islamic worldview.[17] These notions, borrowed from Islamic and Persian intellectual traditions, tied the Bengal tarikhs firmly to a broader scholarly tradition associated with the Islamic world and with Iran.

The tarikh authors also drew upon memories and recollections of people who had either lived through the times being described in these texts or had heard about them from those who had experienced them. The author of the *Siyar* stated that he gathered information for his book from 'persons of eminent rank and credit', who he also described as his 'authorities'.[18] In his *Khulasat-ut-Tawarikh*, Kalyan Singh described in vivid detail his grandfather's visit to the camp of Nadir Shah following the general massacre and plunder in Delhi perpetrated by the latter.[19] Associated with reminiscences and recollections collected from other people, was the phenomenon of first-hand, eye-witness experience of the events described by many of the tarikh writers. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai had personally experienced many of the events and incidents he mentioned in his multi-volume work; so had Maharaja Kalyan Singh, Yusuf Ali Khan, and Karam Ali. Such direct testimony introduces almost a conversational and anecdotal quality to certain parts of these narratives, as well as a vividness and an immediacy which naturally could not be recovered by consulting classic books of earlier generations. But even first-hand memory had its failings. Yusuf Ali Khan composed his account of Nawab Mahabat Jang's reign when he was a person of advanced years, in dire material straits, and in exile in Allahabad. He stated in his book that while he could remember clearly many of the events of the early part of Nawab Ali Vardi Khan's reign, his memory was not as strong when it came to remembering the chronology of events during the later years.[20]

Thus, recollection—personal as well as secondary—and dependence on pre-existing Persian literature, comprised the principal methodologies deployed by the authors of the Persian tarikhs discussed here. Ghulam Hussain Salim claims special notice because, in addition to collecting an archive of Persian works which he consulted for his book, he also used inscriptions, epigraphs, and coins as sources of his narrative. He, in fact, attempted to use such evidence as corroboration to what he found in the existing literature which he consulted.[21] Many decades later, Ilahi Baksh, the disciple of Ghulam Hussain's own student Abdul Karim, also made extensive use of inscriptions, coins, and architectural evidence in his ambitious history of the world called the *Khurshid Jahan Numa*.[22]

The practice of using multiple methodologies to produce these tarikhs meant that the authors were sometimes confronted with multiple versions of the same events as recorded in different types of sources. Ghulam Hussain Salim found a way out of this dilemma by deciding that the inscriptional evidence he saw and read with his own eyes was more reliable than the information contained in any text he consulted.[23] Textual discrepancies must also have confronted these eighteenth century authors with the need to decide which version to accept and more importantly, to deliberate about why they chose to accept one particular version over others. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, for instance, referred to two different versions regarding the events that unfolded during the accession of Jahandar Shah to the Mughal throne.[24] In this case, Ghulam Hussain solved the problem by reproducing for his reader both versions of the event. However, there must have been many more when the author exercised his judgement to determine which version of a past event he chose to incorporate in his book. As Chapter 4 demonstrated, Hindu Bengali scholars of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were also aware of multiple versions of past events in the 'authorities' whom they consulted. Yet, as examples of tarikh writers in this chapter and of certain Hindu Bengali writers from the previous one show, early modern authors, whose practice of historiography would not generally be considered 'rational' or 'modern' by those who practice the modern craft of history, were making conscious choices about how to reconstruct and present to their audiences the events of past times.

Past events as recounted by the tarikh writers were envisioned as connected accounts without gaps or, as the author of the *Siyar* termed it, 'chasms'. Thus, to Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, the specific

motivation for composing his comprehensive narrative was that, in his view, there was no other book which provided a connected account of major developments in the Mughal empire and in Bengal following the death of Aurangzeb. There was also a strong awareness of causation which was rooted not in divine retribution or reward but rather in purely human action. The tarikh writers also exhibited a dedication to factual accuracy. The perceived need to maintain absolute accuracy in reporting names of past kings, for example, was demonstrated by Ghulam Hussain Salim when he weighed textual evidence vis-à-vis inscriptional evidence.[25]

The authors of the Bengal tarikhs were interested primarily in writing about developments in Bengal although all of them positioned Bengal as an integral part of the Mughal empire. The most notable exception was Ghulam Hussain Salim, author of the *Riyaz*, who appended a brief overview of the reigns of Hindu kings who had ruled over Bengal prior to the conquest of the region by Bakhtiyar Khalji. Ghulam Hussain Salim's main interest was in tracing the reigns of Muslim kings in Bengal—the earlier phase consisting of the rule of the 'rais' as he called them, being a sort of casual preamble to the main story. The succession of kings he described seems to have been similar to the list of pre-Muslim Bengal kings given in the *Ain-i-Akbari* by Abul Fazl. They are also similar to the lists contained in the Sanskrit and Bengali chronicles called *Rajabali* or *Rajtaranga* which had circulated in Bengal during the early medieval and early modern periods (see Chapter 4). Ghulam Hussain Salim's brief digression into accounts of Bengal's rajas, prior to the thirteenth century, seems to indicate that such a list was derived partly from Puranic sources, partly from genealogical (kulagrantha) sources, partly probably from Indo-Islamic chronicles, and Persian literature that circulated in Bengal among the literate gentry and upper classes at least since the sixteenth century. The result was a fascinating and chronologically haphazard layering of names of kings and their reigns. In the *Riyaz*, Indian princes are associated with ancient Persian war heroes such as Afrasiyab and Rustum.[26] This account also indicates that pre-Mughal and pre-Islamic history was not the primary object of interest of Persianized scholars and writers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This brief overview lacks the concern with accurate chronology and sequence which was so important a concern in the tarikhs generally. Secondly, this section draws attention to the fact that by the medieval and early modern periods, there may have prevailed in Bengal a general notion about successive lines of kings—both Hindu and Muslim. Abul Fazl

seems to have had access to this account of past kings of Bengal; so did segments of literate Bengali Hindus in the medieval and early modern periods. Ghulam Hussain may well have drawn upon Abul Fazal's *Ain-i-Akbari* for this part of his narrative.

In the tradition of Indo-Persian tarikhs, the tarikhs produced in late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Bengal also devoted the foremost attention to describing and discussing the functioning of monarchical government. Of particular interest to these authors were the following topics: the maintenance of order in the empire through the correct functioning of the institutions of government, the assignment of official positions, awarding of honours and rewards by the ruler or his chief representatives, the suppression of rebellions and disorders, and the punishment of people who threatened the authority or principles of Mughal rule. I argue though, that the Bengal tarikhs also articulated a philosophy and vision of politics which was a modified and recast version of classic Mughal concepts. The following section discusses the specific nature of this modified political tradition.

The Reconstructed Tradition: the Paradigm of Mughal Decline

To the scholar-officials who authored the Bengal tarikhs, the immediate historical context against which they could make sense of the political environment in which they lived was the Mughal empire. This political system and the principles on which it was founded were regarded as the most legitimate ones within the South Asian subcontinent. The Mughal imperial system was likened to an orderly garden and anything that threatened to disturb its harmonious and principled existence—rebellions and disorders, for example—were likened to 'weeds' and 'thorns'.[27] The nawabi of Murshidabad formed the sub-context—but a sub-context that was inseparably associated with the broader context of Mughal hegemony. The Mughal imperium was usually territorialized in these eastern Indian chronicles as 'Hindustan', thereby betraying the general north Indian orientation of the nawabi scholar-bureaucrats. However, the term Hindustan was also generally and loosely extended to mean the entire South Asian subcontinent.

From almost the beginning of the eighteenth century, and definitely from the 1720s and 1730s, it became increasingly clear to anybody who was a conscious observer of political developments in the subcontinent that the empire was in trouble. When contemporaries attempted to

understand better or explain this troubled state, some of the most frequently used terms to describe it were 'confusion', in the sense of chaos, or lack of order; 'subversion' in the sense, of the overturning of some established structure or phenomenon; and 'revolution' in the sense of a very basic or fundamental change.[28] The term *inquilab* which was used frequently in the eighteenth century histories and other literary forms (*shahr-i-ashob* poetry, for example), included in its meaning the range of connotations associated with the word 'revolution' and also possibly, the word 'subversion'. As Lehmann points out, in its eighteenth century sense, 'inquilab' or 'revolution' was closer to its primary meaning of revolution as an observable fact, as in the revolution of the earth or the planets. Inquilab, therefore, literally meant turning and by the extension of its meaning to political affairs, it was used to convey the meaning of change.[29] In this sense, inquilab included in its meaning any change of fortune, a change in the personality of the ruler, or a change in dynasty.

Irrespective of the terms that were used to denote decline, what stands out is the conviction of its authors as well as other contemporaries that they could actually pinpoint and date the commencement of the process of decline although there was no consensus about it. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai categorically dated it to the reign of Aurangzeb and believed that the process had accelerated from the reign of Farrukhsiyar.[30] Atmaram, the former qanungo of Sherghatty, dated it to the fourth year of the reign of Shah Alam.[31] The discourse of decline perceived matters a little differently in Bengal and Bihar. Here, the process of decline was not seen as a prolonged trend gaining in momentum with every successive decade since the early eighteenth century. Neither was the end of the Murshidabad nawabi attributed to a series of unfit rulers. In the case of eastern India, the decline was regarded as more of an abrupt demise—an inquilab brought about by the unwise actions of a single incompetent ruler, that is, Nawab Sirajuddaula. This in turn led to the accession of the 'hat-wearing' firinghees (foreigners) or the English to the position of sovereign over this kingdom. The tragedy of this particular inquilab lay in the fact that the company's regime also failed to measure up to what the former believed were the standards of good government.

Usually these texts offered no clear distinction between the symptoms of decline and the causes of decline. In the general tradition of late Mughal historiography, the authors of the Bengal tarikhs also referred to factors such as bad rulers, laxity in the implementation

of administrative regulations, financial problems as undifferentiated causes and symptoms of the increasing weakness of the empire.[32] Both Ghulam Hussain Salim and Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai referred to the assumption of independence by Mughal provincial governors to be a cause or symptom of the growing weakness of the empire. But ultimately, they believed that this kingdom represented a miniaturized reproduction of most of the laws, institutions, and principles that had characterized the Mughal government. In the view of Tabatabai, for example, the emergence of the nawabi of Murshidabad arrested the steady, downward slide of the empire because it kept at bay the forces of disorder and the collapse of governmental regulations by creating for a while, an oasis of peace, prosperity and good government.

He also regarded the Mughal successor kingdoms of Awadh and Hyderabad in more or less the same way. None of these three Mughal successor states had reached their positions of virtual autonomy by overt rebellions or warfare against the crumbling Mughal central administration. Since decline was perceived to be associated with violence, disorder, and subversion, the absence of these factors in the rise of these three kingdoms explains why contemporary observers found it difficult to see these states as causes of imperial decline or its manifestations. By the same line of reasoning then, it is not difficult to see why the tarikh authors based in eastern India persisted in viewing the activities of the Sikhs, Jats, and the Marathas—regional powers who also sought to shake off Mughal authority, but who did so overtly and through frequent military confrontations—as generally little more than disturbers of peace and as perpetrators of subversion.[33]

The Ruler, the Bureaucracy, and the Goal of Government

In these eighteenth century tarikhs the primary issue of importance was the nature of government. Government was regarded as the practical, tangible manifestation of political power and as something that ultimately underlined the moral and ethical foundations of political authority. The overall consensus among the scholar-aristocrats who composed the Bengal tarikhs was that the goal of good government was the happiness and well-being of its subjects. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, who was unrestrained in his admiration of Nawab Ali Vardi Khan's government in Bengal-Bihar-Orissa, praised it as one that made 'the ease of the people as well of the nobility its foremost objective'.[34]

These eighteenth century narratives perceived governmental ideals to be moral objectives which were not dependant on considerations of rigidly defined religious doctrine, or the values of particular ethnic or even dynastic groups. There are instances in most of these tarikhs when particular political personalities are praised for their zeal in propagating Islam.[35] But the term 'Islam' seems to have been used often to denote a particular kind of overarching political and cultural order rather than Islam in its strict scriptural sense. Similarly race or ethnicity could become matters of secondary importance in the evaluation of the behaviour of those holding shares of formal or de facto political power. This point is best illustrated when the author of the *Siyar* discusses the activities of the Mughal crown prince Ali Gauhar (later, the Mughal emperor Shah Alam) in Bihar during 1759–60. In Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai's description, the arrival of prince Ali Gauhar in Bihar with a large army was initially welcomed by the majority of the people in the region because of the 'favours and good government which they had formally experienced from the prince's forefathers and his ancestors'. But after the prince had spent some time in Bihar, the attitude of the inhabitants towards him changed completely. The plundering activities of the prince and his army devastated the countryside and exposed the people to a great deal of oppression and hardship. They now began to pray for the 'victory and prosperity of the English army' which appeared to them as saviours. This swing in attitude in favour of the English company and its army is explained by Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai by the fact that its behaviour towards the ordinary people of the area was marked by discipline and restraint and was therefore exemplary.[36]

An analysis of the function and importance of the currently reigning monarch occupied, of course, a place of primary importance in the discourse of the eighteenth century tarikh writers.[37] According to the classic Mughal concept of kingship which had developed specifically since the time of Akbar, the ruler was not merely the mortal head of the political system but enjoyed almost a divine mandate to rule.[38] Physically, he was a divine embodiment of royal authority. As Blake explains, the patrimonial character of this emperor-centric polity had to adopt certain bureaucratic features out of sheer and pressing practical necessity.[39] This led to the emergence of the patrimonial-bureaucratic Mughal state, with its large corps of mansabdars and other administrative personnel. However, the central importance of the emperor, both real and symbolic, was not impaired, at least under Akbar's immediate successors. The narratives under discussion here were also based on the

assumption that the ruler was of supreme importance to the political system. However, the architects of these texts made an important deviation from earlier Mughal tarikhs and treatises on governance by positing a significantly different role for the ruler as compared to the classic Mughal theory of royal authority. In the political tradition that was being recast in the later eighteenth century, the monarch was seen as continuing to hold a position of utmost importance in the political system. But significantly enough, it also appeared to be a somewhat ceremonial or decorative position. The personal qualities—competence, sense of justice, etc.—of monarchs were certainly not discounted as factors of importance. But there was also the emerging notion that the ruler should abide by the institutions of Mughal government that had come down at least since the sixteenth century, as well as the principles on which these institutions were based. In other words, what these eighteenth century writers were saying was that these institutions of government had acquired a legitimacy and efficacy through centuries of actual operation; they upheld a kind of society which these scholar-aristocrats supported because they were convinced that it was the right kind of society. This strong consciousness of government as a set of time-tested institutions based on specific moral principles, by implication tended to diminish somewhat the paramount importance of personal qualities possessed by the individual ruler. This sort of institutional or bureaucratic consciousness comprises, for instance, a strong theme in the writings of particularly perceptive contemporary authors such as Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai. It is even stronger in the writings of humbler administrative personnel like Atmaram, the former qanungo of Sherghatty.[40]

As noted above, the purely administrative treatises authored by people like Atmaram during the later eighteenth century cannot be accorded the same status as the tarikhs with their broader, more comprehensive vision of empire and its governance. Yet, the treatises of people like Atmaram, authored in large numbers at the same period when the Bengal tarikhs were written, offer an important complementary perspective into principles of governance articulated by the scholar-aristocrats. People like Atmaram, unlike Yusuf Ali Khan, Karam Ali, or any of the other aristocratic writers, had no personal contact with the emperor or powerful grandees at the fading Mughal darbar at Delhi or for that matter with court circles at Murshidabad. It is unknown if the cult of personal devotion to the emperor which had motivated a subordinate mansabdar like Mirza Nathan in the seventeenth century,

operated among petty revenue officials like Atmaram. Therefore, in the perception of the latter, more than in those of the aristocratic segment of the bureaucracy, the rulers appeared to be distant figures whose reigns served as markers in a long continuum of administrative tradition.[41] This is probably what Fleischer referred to as bureaucratic consciousness, or 'kanun consciousness', in his study of the Ottoman bureaucrat and intellectual Mustapha Ali.[42]

An exploration of the implications contained within this ideology, however, is intrinsically associated with notions about the role of the bureaucracy in a political system. Bhimsen Burhanpuri, the mid-level Mughal bureaucrat par excellence, had never served under the Murshidabad nawabs nor been present in Bengal during his long and chequered official career. However, Bhimsen's famous memoirs serve as a mirror for the general philosophy among the middle to upper levels of the Mughal bureaucracy in the seventeenth century and their later Mughal/nawabi counterparts in the next century. In Bhimsen's description:

> He [God] hoisted the banner of love in the field of the human body by making the heart the ruler of the empire of physical body of the man and He gave orders to the other parts and the limbs of the body to abide by the commandments of the heart....Thus...each limb should have a definite work to do and must have clear significance and not a single moment should be wasted in having the responsibility entrusted to it so that the said limb should not become useless and crippled.[43]

In other words, just as the human body could not function without its limbs, the empire could not function without its bureaucrats. As writers of the eighteenth century tarikhs saw it, one of the most important duties of a ruler on ascending the throne, or of an official on assuming an administrative post, was to appoint a body of bureaucrats to fill the most important administrative and military positions under him. This function was viewed as an acid test of the inherent abilities of a ruler since much merit was attributed to the ruler's power to recognize administrative talent in potential officials and to harness these qualities for the service of the empire. Personal likes and dislikes of the emperor were supposed to be low in priority compared to the great task of selecting able officials to work for the realm. The Mughal emperor Farrukhsiyar (1714–19), for example, is depicted as distributing the highest offices of his government to nobles like Abdullah Khan and

Hussain Ali Khan whose support had enabled him to win the recent war of succession, but also to Chin Qilich Khan—one of the ablest mansabdars of the time—who had not been on his side in the war.[44] Emperor Jahandar Shah (1719–48) is condemned for raising the friends and relatives of his mistress, Lal Kuar, to the highest public offices.[45] These beneficiaries of Jahandar Shah's favour, particularly the latter group, are strongly denounced by Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai as undeserving people. This naturally raises the question as to who, in the views of these scholar-bureaucrats, was considered to be equipped with the right qualities to hold the highest public offices.

The people who were most suited to hold the highest civil and military offices of the state, according to the eighteenth century writers, were like themselves—that is, men who came from families with pre-existing traditions of bureaucratic service, preferably in the upper echelons of the mansabdari cadre. Since the higher mansabdari families constituted the aristocracy, it therefore also implied that these people had to be of noble birth and to have been raised in a culture of khanazadgi which was believed to instill in them the qualities and virtues required of the highest office-holders. The assumption was that this upbringing endowed them with a much higher potential for being competent and able officials than those who did not possess such family backgrounds. Interestingly enough, professional success as a high official and a conscious adherence to other features of aristocratic life also permitted people from non-khanazad backgrounds to earn acceptance from the aristocratic tarikh writers. An excellent example of such a scholar-bureaucrat who came from a humble background, but rose to hold one of the highest offices under the Murshidabad niabat, is Raja Ramnarayan who was also distinguished by his considerable scholarly accomplishments.[46]

But whether descended from a mansabdari lineage or not, the function and obligations of bureaucrats holding the highest posts were clear. A degree of loyalty to the ruler who had recruited them to these offices was an obvious duty. But the foremost priority for them was believed to lie in 'dispatching the affairs of state and promoting the welfare of the empire which conduct after all ought to be the intent and scope of [bureaucratic/mansabdari] employment and service'.[47] Secondly, an important new note that is evident in these eighteenth century tarikhs deals with the duty of mansabdars to act as the custodians of the empire. This idea, which was not expressed so strongly or openly as a component of Mughal political ideology, either under Akbar or

his immediate successors, seems to have acquired a dominant position in the political traditions that the eighteenth century tarikh writers sought to articulate.

As the later Mughal scholar-bureaucrats saw it, the nobility were not merely people who held office at the pleasure and whims of the ruler. On the contrary, they were a class of noble, competent individuals with family traditions of service to whatever political system they lived under. Thus, emperors and rulers could come and go—as in fact they did at the Mughal capital at Delhi through much of the eighteenth century—but this corps of dedicated and committed bureaucrats remained constant and provided a degree of stability by espousing the long-term welfare of the realm and its subjects. Portrayed in this way, the higher ranks of the bureaucracy appear in these texts almost as a group of vigilant protectors of the polity. In this capacity, they were expected to act as the conscience of the empire: to act as advisers and counsellors to kings, to possess the courage to rectify the ruler's mistakes, and to tell him when he was wrong. Such a role of the bureaucracy seems to have been legitimated through the notion that it was the upper bureaucracy and their ancestors whose hard work had created the institutional foundations on which the government rested and, therefore, they had as large a stake in the well-being of the kingdom as the monarch. Several of the Bengal tarikhs provide examples of this philosophy. The distribution of the highest offices and honours by Jahandar Shah to 'undeserving' people has been referred to above. His mistress Lal Kuar came from a family of musicians. Yet, according to Tabatabai's narrative, the emperor elevated her brother as well as her uncle to mansabdari rank.[48]

According to the *Siyar*, these people abused the power they now undeservedly held. Lal Kuar's bother, Khoshal Kan, for instance, broke the law repeatedly and became a nuisance to the citizenry of Delhi. In these circumstances, some of the best-known mansabdars of the time—people who were steeped in the bureaucratic culture of the empire's highest official corps—attempted to protect the empire and its subjects from the baneful influence of those who had no right to be in such positions of power and influence. An illuminating example of the higher bureaucrats' role in steering the emperor and the administration from moving in what was perceived as the wrong direction is furnished by the instance of Jahandar Shah's alleged efforts to endow the governorship of the province of Allahabad on his mistress' unworthy brother, Khoshal Khan. In Tabatabai's narrative, Zulfiqar Khan, the

wazir (prime minister) of the Mughal emperor, on being informed of this plan, deliberately insulted Khoshal Khan. When this news reached the ears of the emperor, Zulfiqar Khan used the opportunity to deliver a sharp and sarcastic rebuke to the latter:

> ...the nobility, your servants, are from father to son in possession of serving the crown in vice-royalties, governments and such other employments and the custom of your imperial ancestors has been only to amuse themselves with dancers and singers whose merits it was customary to reward only with pensions and bounties. So soon as these last shall aspire to dignities and governments and shall contrive, to take possession of them, there shall remain then, no other party for your nobility but that of betaking themselves to the profession just forsaken by the dancers and singers...for after all...your dispossessed governors and generals...have a right to earn their bread as well as any others.[49]

In Ghulam Hussain's depiction, this stinging reprimand from his prime minister shamed Jahandar Shah into acquiescing in stopping Khoshal Khan's undeserved elevation within the administration.

When analysed further, these examples yield more insights into the eighteenth century scholar-officials' notions regarding the role of people of their class and professional background in the polity. As Ghulam Hussian Tabatabai and others like him saw it, society was divided into different spheres where people endowed with different qualities and abilities were positioned. People like Lal Kuar, Khoshal Khan, and their friends and families belonged to a sphere which could not be permitted to intersect with the sphere to which people like Zulfiqar Khan belonged. The description of the above incidents by Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai in his narrative reflects the insecurity and resentment experienced by career mansabdars—especially of khanazad backgrounds—at the 'invasion' of the highest ranks of the administrative service by people from different social and professional backgrounds, as well as their determination to exclude these 'upstarts' from these positions. However, in the conscious construction of a late Mughal/nawabi political ethos in the late eighteenth century such practical insecurities found formal expression in the formulation of a political tradition in which powerful mansabdars regarded the empire and its government as a practically sacred trust which it was their duty to guard from corrupting influences. This right was however not seen as one which they had undeservedly usurped for themselves. On the contrary, it was believed that they had earned it on account of their dedication to the empire and its

governmental institutions. This right was also rooted in the fact that they had the training and experience to be the most competent people to make judgements about how the government should be run.

The professional competence, of which mansabdars were so proud, did not merely denote an adeptness at the day-to-day task of administration. In the tarikhs studied here, mansabdari competence was also associated with virtue, that is, an adherence to the ethical principles on which the institutions of government were based. The examples cited above underscore the importance given to virtue as a necessary quality among the late Mughal/nawabi ruling class.

Interestingly enough the role played by the nobility in steering the empire on the right course became especially important only when the ruler was perceived to be straying from the norms and customs by which their administrative systems were supposed to be run. Thus, discussion of the affairs of the kingdom of Bengal-Bihar-Orissa do not for the most part seek to highlight the role played by its mansabdars as vigilant custodians of the political system. The explanation lies in the fact that there is near unanimity among authors like Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, Salimullah Munshi, Ghulam Hussain Salim, and others that the first three rulers of this kingdom were excellent administrators and rulers, imbued with the right principles and values.[50] Actually, as long as these rulers maintained intact most of the outward forms of the Mughal administrative system and did not seek to radically alter governmental institutions like the mansabdari system, the bureaucratic elite, from which most of the eighteenth century tarikh writers were drawn, had little reason to worry about the well being of their class. They and people like them continued to be selected to fill the most responsible offices in Bengal–Bihar–Orissa; it was also they who made up the majority in the close and select ring of advisers and counsellors who exerted the maximum influence over the nawab and therefore over the entire kingdom. The authors of the Bengal tarikhs thus had little reason to be threatened by the actions of Murshid Quli (1700–20), Shujauddin (1720–40), and Ali Vardi Khan (1740–56). As they emphasized in the eulogies of these rulers, they were exemplary, precisely because they relied on the professional nobility in the running of the kingdom.

If the political ideology being shaped in the Bengal tarikhs perceived of the highest bureaucrats of the kingdom as people who had a stake in it, then, by implication it also imposed on them the task of preserving the governmental institutions and political system by actively getting rid of unfit rulers. At any rate, there is no clear condemnation of those who

actually did this. The nawabi of Bengal-Bihar-Orissa provides some of the best instances of such cases. In 1740, Ali Vardi usurped the throne of Murshidabad from the son of Shujauddin, the recently deceased nawab and the person to whom Ali Vardi and his entire family were indebted for their professional advancement. Ali Vardi's action in killing Sarafaraz Khan, the heir of Shuja, is acknowledged to be an abhorrent act which initially horrified the people of Murshidabad. But even this action is legitimized on the ground that Sarfaraz Khan 'had no talents for government...and that, had his government lasted some time more... endless confusions would have been the consequence of his incapacity... disorders and disturbances would have been the consequence...and would have brought ruin and desolation on these countries and their inhabitants'.[51] Ali Vardi, on the other hand, turned out to be an able and virtuous ruler who governed his kingdom well. [52]

The removal of Nawab Sirajuddaula (1756–7) from power through a conspiracy constitutes one of the best-known events in the history of early modern India. It paved the way for a dramatic escalation in the power of the English East India Company in eastern India, led to the ultimate establishment of its governance over this region, and in turn became the first step towards the creation of a British empire in India. Most of the tarikh writers under consideration here were contemporaries of Nawab Sirajuddaula. Their treatment of the latter's removal from power is similar to the case cited immediately above. Ghulam Hussain Salim, Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, and Karam Ali are unanimous in agreeing that the real cause of Siraj's removal from power lay in the fact that he lacked the qualities and virtues that good rulers must have. The tragic flaw thus lay in Siraj's own personality. He is portrayed as unwise and capricious, and worse still, he ignored and humiliated the nobility who had helped the previous nawab to rule wisely and well. What eventually led to Siraj's downfall, according to these contemporary commentators, was that he gave prominence to certain undeserving people who gave him bad and unsound advice.[53] Thus, in the opinion of the tarikh writers, the participants in the pre-Plassey conspiracy did what they had to do in order to free the kingdom from a tyrannical and oppressive ruler. The goal, in other words, almost made it legitimate to seek the displacement of the current ruler, whose servants they were supposed to be.

By extension of the same logic, there is little condemnation of ambitious aristocrats who sought to carve out power bases of their own from the parent Mughal system. The Bengal nawabs—from

Murshid Quli to Ali Vardi—who were eulogized by these eighteenth century writers had done precisely this; but instead of being castigated for disloyalty, they were upheld as practically ideal rulers. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai's comment on similar kingdom-building activities by the Mughal noble and mansabdar Chin Qilich Khan in Hyderabad and Saadat Khan in Awadh are ambiguous at best—but not openly censorious. As he and the other scholar-officials saw it, as long as able and 'virtuous' nobles were able to provide good government to the regions under their control, without overtly rejecting Mughal supremacy or jettisoning the Mughal system of government too radically, it was of little significance whether they were appointed officials of the Mughal government, or were practically autonomous rulers.

Government as a System of Moral Principles

As seen above, the lower bureaucracy—that is, people who served as revenue officials, accountants, and the like—unlike aristocratic officials like Yusuf Ali Khan or Karam Ali had little actual contact with the ruler or the circle of mansabdars who surrounded the latter. In their perception, therefore, government appeared to be even less of a personalized, patrimonial system than a machine-like system with its component functions bound together by a large range of administrative rules and regulations. To the lower bureaucracy, too, the principal aim of government was the 'welfare of the people and the prosperity of the country'.[54] Unlike the scholar-officials, however, they perceived this as something that was attainable not through the practice of general moral principles but rather through concrete and specific administrative functions. The collection of revenue, for example, should be carried out in accordance with rules which had been formulated earlier—in a classicized Mughal past. In practical terms this meant adherence, for example, to practices like the separation of the revenue administration (*diwani*) from the executive branch of government (*nizamat*). Reinforcing this tendency to perceive the government as a mammoth machine which ought to function according to a set of rules was important, and qanungos like Atmaram saw the government archive as a repository of actual records relating to previous custom, and hence a legitimating authority in administrative matters.

The almost mechanical precision with which revenue officials like Atmaram defined and established distinctions among different kinds

of administrative terminology relating to various kinds of lands, land tenures, different categories of peasants, kinds of officials involved in the collection of revenue, detailed figures of collections made under different heads of revenue, and others, reinforces the mechanistic view of government as propagated by these petty bureaucrats.[55]

As the petty bureaucracy, exemplified by Atmaram, saw it, the ideal revenue administration associated with former times had become somewhat derailed because the 'customs' or rules which had kept it on the right track were being disregarded.[56] It is necessary to keep in mind, however, that when Atmaram wrote about the deterioration of the system of revenue administration, he really used it a as a microcosm of the empire, or the polity as a whole. The notion that these developments were attributable to human agency was present. But the stronger notion that comes through is that these instances of malfunction could be corrected quite simply by appointing knowledgeable, experienced qanungos who knew exactly how the revenue administration should be run. The remedy advertised by Atmaram seems to suggest that, to him, the revenue collecting machinery could be restored to its prior condition by replacing a number of flawed parts with good ones.[57]

Like their counterparts in the mansabdari echelons of administration, the qanungos too believed that they were indispensable for the smooth running of the empire. They might not have quite regarded themselves as partners in the empire like some scholar-officials of that period. But they certainly believed that they were indispensable subordinates.[58]

The English East India Company: A Reversal of the Principles on which Government Ought to be Based

To the authors of the Bengal tarikhs, the English East India Company represented a negation of the values and principles according to which government had functioned in a classicized Mughal past. There was a general realization that the pattern of administration had begun to get distorted in many ways even before the East India Company staged its inquilab or revolution in eastern India. The emergence of the Company as the sovereign government of Bengal after 1772 seemed to make the restoration of government and administration to its former ideals almost impossible, unless the Company altered the way it ruled its territories in eastern India.

The terms of the critique formulated by tarikh writers against the English regime are significant because they drew upon the philosophy

of political power and values contained in their narratives. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai and Karam Ali sought to distinguish between the signs of misgovernance as well as the deeper, more fundamental principles from which they were derived. To both these authors, the most powerful signs of misgovernance lay in the declining prosperity of Bengal and in the suffering and oppression of a wide cross section of the people of these regions. These signs of malaise were diagnosed as springing from the fact that the company as sovereign betrayed a lack of commitment to certain moral and ethical principles upon which, the tarikh writers believed, indigenous governments in their uncorrupted forms had traditionally been based.[59]

The Company's lack of concern, or 'affection' as Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai termed it, for the people of their dominions in eastern India was regarded as a serious deficiency in its administration. Karam Ali pointed out that the company's callous and apathetic behaviour during the famine of 1769–70 was sufficient testimony of such unconcern.[60] Secondly, these critics also alleged that the British gave a degree of primacy to the goal of extracting a financial profit from their kingdom that was incompatible with the ideals of a just and caring administration. The imposition of the East India Company's 'monopoly' over the opium and saltpetre trades, for example, was attributed to this motive, as was the fact that every Company employee used his official position in order to secure advantages in trade.[61]

The paramount reason that rendered the East India Company's government an undesirable regime was the fact that it did not regard the adherence to and support of virtue as its guiding philosophy. Previous regimes in Bengal had followed the practice of granting revenue-free lands to holy men, scholars, and nobles who had rendered valuable service to the state. To the authors of the Bengal tarikhs, such people embodied virtues which the government ought to recognize and support. In fact, many of the tarikh writers and their families had enjoyed such estates for generations. Writing at a time when the Company's government launched a programme of relentlessly resuming various forms of revenue prerogatives (income from markets, shrines, revenue-free lands, jagirs, and other such) enjoyed by these kinds of people, Karam Ali came out with a stinging reprimand:

> Even if they [the East India Company] had left these people a land carrying revenue of rupees one lakh, they would not have starved. The just rulers [of the past] had been doing this. The considerate rulers have been looking after

such honourable persons of society as may not have the capacity to earn their livelihood; the rulers have been giving them a loaf of bread. The English however are completely indifferent.[62]

Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai and Karam Ali also condemned the Company for its seeming incapacity to understand the noble principles on which certain institutions of indigenous government were based. This resulted in the debasement and corruption of certain crucially important administrative offices like that of the judge (*qazi*), the supervisor of revenue-free lands (*sadr-us-sadr*), and several others. These offices were now reduced to instruments of oppression over the subject body.[63]

But this tragic failure to understand the principles of government was attributed sometimes openly, sometimes implicitly, by the tarikh writers to the fact that the English were alien to India and its customs and did not seem to wish to overcome this alienness. The later eighteenth century was a time when several of the Company's officials were known to interact socially with the nawabi upper class, and noblemen like Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai stood on terms of personal friendship with several of them. Recent scholarship acknowledges the existence of such social relationships, but also points to the obvious boundaries and limitations of such social interaction which derived from considerations of race, class, the growing awareness of the difference in status between the rulers and the ruled and other factors.[64] Contemporaries like the author of the *Siyar* were more than conscious of the boundaries which separated him from the new rulers. He thus categorically stated that the problems between ruler and ruled lay in a sea of differences comprised of divergent political values and cultural practices that had yet to be bridged.[65]

According to Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai the real defeat of Indian society vis-à-vis the English lay in the fact that the former had failed to make the latter succumb to its 'customs' as it had apparently succeeded in doing with earlier groups of foreign conquerors.[66] The net result was the emergence of a sovereign power that preserved its alien character and betrayed no desire to understand either Indian society or to care for its Indian subjects. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai felt that the only reason the English maintained some kind of contact with people like him was because the latter needed information about Indian society and government from them. The self-imposed cultural alienation of the English and the economic devastation of the country due to the wealth the company drained away from India did not 'fertilize' the Indian economy.[67] Several of the tarikh writers were critical of the

East India Company's style of governance. But nobody possessed the clear-sighted perception of Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai who had lived through the momentous events which led to the termination of the Murshidabad niabat and the concomitant rise in the political power of the English company. He recognized the elements which constituted the misgovernance of the Company. Quite remarkably though, he was able to transcend the many instances of misgovernance and to form the much wider notion that the East India Company's government was primarily different because it was a form of colonial rule. In doing so, the author of the *Siyar* may well have formulated one of the earliest coherent indigenous critiques of colonial rule in India.

The Timing and Function of the Bengal Tarikhs

A feature whose importance cannot be emphasized enough is the timing of these texts. Almost all the Bengal tarikhs were composed during the period which was positioned between two political processes—the decline of the nawabi and the accession in the political power of the English Company. What renders the Bengal tarikhs even more significant is, as Sir J.N. Sarkar pointed out, that these narratives constituted in all probability the main corpus of Persian tarikhs to have been composed in Bengal, not just during the period of nawabi rule, but also during a century or more of Mughal rule and about three centuries of rule by successive Turkish and Afghan rulers over this region.[68] Sarkar's statement overlooks the *Baharistan-i-Ghaibi* of Mirza Nathan and the *Fathiyah-i-Ibriyyah* of Shihabuddin Talish—both composed in the seventeenth century.[69] But these narratives are much more preoccupied with military exercises and less with longer-term imperatives of governance and political culture as viewed from the vantage point of the various permanent centres of administration in Bengal. Also, neither Mirza Nathan, nor Shihabuddin Talish betray any strong sense of connection—whether familial or professional—to Bengal as tarikh writers like Ghulam Hussain Khan Tabatabai did.

It is true that the currency of Persian under the Bengal sultanate was not as great as it was to become under Mughal rule. But as seen in Chapter 1, it was not insignificant either. This renders truly surprising the fact that we do not know of any Persian tarikhs (barring the works of Mirza Nathan and Shihabuddin Talish) having been composed by the Persianized aristocracy or gentry of this region either at their own

initiative, or at the command of the nawabs who sat on the *masnad* at Murshidabad. One would have expected the architects of a new kingdom to have shown much greater attention and interest in the commissioning of written accounts about their accomplishments. Perhaps the arduous task of building an autonomous kingdom had sufficiently occupied the energy and attention of the first few nawabs to preclude any active programme of commissioning or encouraging tarikhs. This is particularly true of Nawab Ali Vardi Khan whose energies had been directed solely to defending the physical survival of the kingdom from the Bargis. Chapter 7 suggests that perhaps the Murshidabad nawabs, aware of the need to cement closer ties with sections of the local population of Bengal, may well have toyed with the prospect of encouraging the production of narratives—historical and otherwise—in the region's vernacular language in emulation of the pre-Mughal sultans. Much more research is needed to support this line of thinking. Besides, even if the nawabs were beginning to get interested in patronizing the composition of Bengali literary works, it need not necessarily have precluded the commissioning of Persian tarikhs. As recent research shows, the Mughal tradition involved an active cultural patronage of multiple languages and literary traditions.[70] Thus, at this stage, the non-production of Persian tarikhs in Bengal, despite the existence of a Persianized ruling class, nobility, and gentry must remain somewhat of a paradox.

Fortunately, the unsatisfactory exploration into the possible reasons for the non-production of tarikhs in Bengal prior to the late eighteenth century does not exclude a more thorough discussion of the factors that lay behind the composition of a range of such narratives here during the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Some of these tarikhs had been directly commissioned by the new English rulers of Bengal. Ghulam Hussain Salim was an employee of George Udny, who was in charge of an indigo concern in Malda in northern Bengal and composed the *Riyaz-us-Salatin* at the request of the latter.[71] Ghulam Hussain Tabatabi dedicated his comprehensive, multi-volume work entitled the *Siyar-ul-Mutakhirin* to Warren Hastings, the Governor-General of Bengal, though it followed the latter's departure from India. The Bengal tarikhs embody above all the endeavour of a segment of the nawabi aristocracy to represent the political ideals of the old Mughal order to their new masters and at the same time to convince the latter of the need to continue to provide bureaucratic offices to people like

them. The Company employed some of these nawabi officials during the first few years of its association with the Bengal administration because their experience and knowledge were deemed indispensable for a new and fledging regime. But by the mid to late 1770s, nawabi bureaucrats were being eliminated from the company's administration and replaced by English officials. This affected these people severely as they were simultaneously faced with severe pressure due to the loss of hereditary landed estates and other forms of income guaranteed to them and their families by earlier governmental authorities. Even during the brief period when the East India Company retained the services of many of the high level nawabi officials, some of them were accused of corruption and were publicly humiliated and tried. The highly publicized trials of people like Syed Mohammed Reza Khan, Maharaja Shitab Rai, as well as the trial of Maharaja Nanda Kumar must have given people of the social class and background as the tarikh writers serious concern about employment prospects in the East India Company's government.[72] Yet these were the jobs for which people like Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai or Yusuf Ali Khan and their families had been trained for many generations. Their emphasis on the role of the nobility as protectors of the empire represented a recasting of the Mughal political philosophy; it also represented the anxiety and dire need felt by the scholar-officials of the niabat for bureaucratic offices in the Company's administration. Yet, as seen above, some of the tarikh writers were open critics of the Company's style of governance. Thus many of these texts bear the signs of a strain that derived from the fact that these works had been written in the hope of securing the Company's patronage and yet they were also the means through which some of the earliest critiques of early colonial regime were expressed.[73]

Thus the function of these Bengal tarikhs is directly related to the political and social context from which they were derived. The tarikhs advanced a political philosophy which depicted the Mughal institutions of government to be time-tested and beneficial ones. Yet the contingent contemporary concerns of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries necessitated a redefinition of an earlier political tradition. The Bengal tarikhs used the narratives of the past to formulate the first coherent critiques of early colonial rule and attempted to point out to the new rulers of the region what alternative methods of government they should adopt instead.

The Bengal Tarikhs and Colonial Knowledge

Although the company had functioned in Bengal for more than a century, its sudden elevation to the position of sovereign in the late eighteenth century compelled it to acquire a thorough knowledge and understanding about matters which had hitherto fallen beyond the scope of their operations. This constitutes one of the best known phases of early colonial rule in India and is associated with the orientalist project launched in particular by Warren Hastings and carried to fruition by people like Sir William Jones, Henry Colebrooke, and many others.[74] This aspect of British orientalist scholarship of the late eighteenth century has received the maximum attention from scholars and involves the deliberate endeavour of East India Company functionaries to use Indian scholars—typically Brahman pundits and *maulavi*s—to gather information about the customs and traditions of Indian society. The 'tradition', which figures mostly in contemporary scholarship on this topic, involves laws and social customs which were connected to the religious traditions of Hinduism and Islam.

As this chapter demonstrates, a segment of the nawabi bureaucracy—high, middle, and low level—also participated in this programme of knowledge-acquisition about Indian society pioneered by the East India Company. The knowledge that people like this could communicate to their new masters was less directly concerned with social customs and laws regarding marriage, inheritance, and others. Instead, in the hands of educated and refined aristocratic writers who were positioned close to centres of governmental authority and power, such 'knowledge transfer' assumed the form of narratives of past empires and rulers together with a discussion of their institutions and principles of governance. The more subordinate bureaucrats like Atmaram communicated very detailed information about the finer nuances of revenue collection and the maintenance of revenue records. Yet the transmission of such governmental knowledge to the Company by segments of the nawabi bureaucracy is barely acknowledged in existing secondary literature.

As incumbents who had very recently been elevated to the status of sovereign, the East India Company in Bengal exhibited an intense hunger for information about various aspects of their kingdom's past. This urgency often found expression in exasperation and frustration with their Indian 'informants' who, they believed, were withholding critically important information from them. Ranajit Guha characterizes

this as a form of resistance to British rule.[75] Indeed there may well have been nawabi officials who chose to deny the company such information. As the discussion in this chapter has shown, there were also nawabi bureaucrats who used their tarikhs to represent to the British colonial regime the ideals and institutions of the political order with which they had been associated and to compare the current regime unfavourably with it. In a sense, the Bengal tarikhs also constituted a form of scholarly resistance or contestation because they became mediums of self-representation vis-à-vis the colonialist commentaries on India (the topic of the following chapter) which were also being composed during the same time.

Notes

1. These processes are described in Sir Jadunath Sarkar, *History of Bengal*, Patna, 1973; Abdul Karim, *Murshid Quli Khan and his Times*, Dacca, 1963; K.K. Datta, *Ali Vardi Khan and His Times*, Calcutta, 1963; K. Chatterjee, *Merchants, Politics and Society in Early Modern India*, Leiden, 1996.

2. J.F. Richards, 'Norms of Comportment among Imperial Mughal Officials', in Barbara Metcalf, *Moral Conduct and Authority, The Place of Adab in South Asean Islam*, Berkeley, 1984, p. 267.

3. Ghulam Hussain Khan Tabatabai, *Seir Mutaqherin*, Nota Manus (tr.); Yusuf Ali Khan, *Tarikh-i-Bangala-i-Mahabat Jangi*, Abdus Subhan (tr.), Calcutta, 1982; Karam Ali, *Muzaffarnama*, Shaista Khan (tr.), Patna, 1992; Frederick Louis Lehmann, 'The Eighteenth Century Transition in India: Responses of Some Bihar Intellectuals', unpublished PhD dissertation, Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1967.

4. Maharaja Kalyan Singh Ashiq (tr. Sarfaraz Hussain Khan), 'Khulasatu-t-Tawarikh', *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society*, vol. 5, 1919, part 2, pp. 218–35, part 3, pp. 334–63, part 4, pp. 604–17; vol. 6, 1920, part 1, pp. 124–9, part 2, pp. 302–17, part 3, pp. 424–42, part 4, pp. 540–61; vol. 9, 1923, part 2, pp. 209–61; also Lehmann, 'Eighteenth Century Transition'.

5. Ruby Lal, *Domesticity and Power in the Early Mughal World*, Cambridge, 2005, contains a broad treatment of the roles played by Mughal women.

6. Richards, 'Norms of Comportment', pp. 262–76.

7. 'Substance of a Persian Treatise on the Revenues of Bengal', undated and by an anonymous author in, 'Mr Murray's Papers on the Revenues

of Bengal', also undated in Home Miscellaneous, vol. 68, Oriental and India Office Records (OIOR), London: British Library (hereafter, 'Persian treatise'); 'Abstract of Accounts Relative to the Soubeh of Behar Prepared and Delivered by Canongoes of Several Parganas, Fasli 1180 AD', in Home Miscellaneous, vol. 387, OIOR, London: British Library (hereafter, 'Atmaram's Account'). Both commentaries may have been authored by the same person.

8. These observations are based on Tabatabai, *Seir*; Khan, *Tarikh*; Ali, *Muzaffarnama*; Zaidpuri, *Riyazu-s-Salatin*.

9. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Siyar*, vol. 1, p. 25.

10. Ibid., p. 24.

11. Ghulam Hussain Salim, *Riyaz*, p. 1.

12. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Seir*, vol.1, p. 24.

13. Ghulam Hussain Salim, *Riyaz*, pp. 4–5.

14. Akshay Kumar Maitra, 'Khurshid Jahan Numa', *Aitihasik Chitra*, vol. 3, nos 5 and 6, 1901 (?) pp. 275–9; Henry Beveridge, 'The Khurshid Jahan Numa of Ilahi Baksh al Hussaini Angrezabadi', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, vol. 64, no. 1, 1895, pp. 194–229.

15. Ghulam Hussain Salim, *Riyaz*, pp. 2–3.

16. Francis Gladwin, *A Narrative of Transactions in Bengal. A Translation of Salimullah's Tarikh-i-Bangla*, 1906, Calcutta, p. 3.

17. Ghulam Hussain Salim, *Riyaz*, p. 7; Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, pp. 28–61; Benjamin Braude, 'The Sons of Noah and the Construction of Ethnic and Geographical Identities in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods', *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 54, no. 1, 1997, pp. 103–11.

18. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Seir*, vol. 1, p. 25.

19. Kalyan Singh Ashiq, 'Khulasatu-t-Tawarikh', vol. 9, no. 2: pp. 234–5.

20. Yusuf Ali Khan, *Tarikh*, pp. 41–2.

21. Ghulam Hussain Salim, *Riyaz*, pp. 4–5.

22. Maitra, 'Khurshid Jahan Nama'; Beveridge, 'The Khurshid Jahan Numa of Sayyid Ilahi Baksh al Hussaini Angrezabadi'.

23. Ghulam Hussain Salim, *Riyaz*, p. 137.

24. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Seir*, vol. 1: pp. 41–2.

25. Ghulam Hussain Salim, *Riyaz*, p. 137.

26. Ibid., pp. 53–5, 56.

27. Ibid., p. 167.

28. OIOR, Home Miscellaneous, vol. 68: 'Mr Murray's Papers on

the Revenues of Bengal'; Coast and Bay Abstracts, Fort William General Letter dated 29 January 1726. The term 'revolution' occurs very frequently in almost all eighteenth and early nineteenth century materials consulted for this chapter.

29. Lehmann, 'Eighteenth Century Transition'; also see Chatterjee. *Merchants, Politics and Society,* pp. 205–30.

30. Tabatabai, *Seir,* vol. 3: pp. 159–60.

31. 'Atmaram's Account'.

32. For this tendency in late Mughal historiography in general (that is, in works not relating to eastern India) see Ali Mohammed Khan, *Mirat-i-Ahmadi*, M.F. Lokhandwala (tr.), Baroda, 1965; Zahiruddin Malik, 'Persian Historiography in India During the Eighteenth Century', in *Historians of Medieval India*, Mohibbul Hasan (ed.), Meerut, 1968, pp. 147–9. References to causes/symptoms of decline in works of Eastern India-based authors occur in Tabatabai, *Seir*; Ali, *Muzaffarnama*; 'Atmaram's Account', and others.

33. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Seir,* and Ghulam Hussain Salim, *Riyaz* contain generous praises of the Murshidabad nawabs Murshid Quli Khan, Shujauddin, and Ali Vardi Khan.

34. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Seir,* vol. 2, p. 113.

35. For example, Gladwin, *Narrative of Transactions,* p. 109.

36. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Seir,* vol. 3, pp. 189–90.

37. The repeated praises of the personal qualities of nawabs Murshid Quli (Gladwin, *Narrative of Transactions,* p. 109), Shujauddin (Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Seir,* vol. 1, p. 279; Rustam Ali, 'Tarikh-i-Hind', in H.M. Elliot and J. Dowson, *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians*, vol. 8, New York, 1966 (rpt), p. 67; and Ali Vardi Khan (Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Seir,* vol. 1, p. 341), for example, indicate this as do open criticisms of the later Mughal emperors.

38. J.F. Richards, 'The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jehangir', in *The Mughal State, 1526–1750*, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 126–67; Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam: India 1200–1800,* Chicago, 2004.

39. Stephen P. Blake, *Shahjahanabad: The Sovereign City in Mughal India 1639–1739*, Cambridge, 1991.

40. 'Atmaram's Account'.

41. Ibid.

42. Cornell Fleischer, *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire*, Princeton, 1986.

43. *Translation of Tarikh-i-Dilkasha: Memoirs of Bhimsen Relating to Aurangzeb's Deccan Campaign, Sir Jadunath Sarkar Birth Centenary Commemoration Volume,* V.G. Khobrekar (ed.), Bombay, 1972, p. 1.

44. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Seir,* vol. 1, pp. 58–60.

45. Ibid., pp. 36–7.

46. Lehmann, 'Eighteenth Century Transition'.

47. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Seir,* vol. 1, pp. 114–15.

48. Ibid., pp. 36–7.

49. Ibid.

50. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Seir,* Ghulam Hussain Salim, *Riyaz,* Gladwin, *Narrative of Transactions,* and Yusuf Ali Khan, *Tarikh*, all contain scattered references which reveal positive opinions held by these writers.

51. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Seir,* vol. 1, p. 342.

52. Ibid., pp. 341–2.

53. Ghulam Hussain Salim, *Riyaz,* pp. 363–4; Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Seir,* vol. 2, pp. 186–7, 193.

54. 'Atmaram's Account'.

55. 'Atmaram's Account'; 'Persian Treatise'.

56. 'Atmaram's Account'.

57. 'Atmaram's Account'; 'Persian Treatise'.

58. 'Atmaram's Account'.

59. Karam Ali, *Muzaffarnama*, p. 43; Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Seir,* vol. 3, pp. 158–213.

60. Karam Ali, *Muzaffarnama,* p. 36.

61. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Seir,* vol. 3, pp. 158–213; also Chatterjee, *Merchants, Politics and Society.*

62. Karam Ali, *Muzaffarnama,* p. 43.

63. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Seir,* vol. 3, pp. 158–213.

64. Durba Ghosh, *Sex and the Family in Colonial India,* Cambridge, 2006. It contains an insightful commentary on the boundaries restricting social and other types of interactions between Indians and the British in eighteenth century Bengal.

65. Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, *Seir,* vol. 3, pp. 158–213.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.

68. Sarkar, *History of Bengal,* p. 501.

69. Mirza Nathan, *Baharistan-i-Ghaibi*; H. Blochmann, 'Koch Bihar, Koch Hajo and Asam in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries according to the Akbarnamah, the Padishahnamah and the Fathiyah-

i-Ibriyah', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal,* 1872, vol. 41, no. 1, pp. 49–113.

70. Sumit Guha, 'Transitions and Translations: Regional Power and Vernacular Identity in the Dakhan, 1500–1800', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East,* vol. 24, no. 2, 2004, pp. 23–31; Allison Busch, 'The Anxiety of Innovation: The Practice of Literary Science in the Hindi/Riti Tradition', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East,* vol. 24, no. 2, 2004, pp. 45–59.

71. Ghulam Hussain Salim, *Riyaz,* p. 3.

72. For a description of these processes, see Abdul Majed Khan, *The Transition in Bengal, 1756–65: A Study of Muhammad Reza Khan,* Cambridge, 1969; Lehmann, 'Eighteenth Century Transition'; K. Chatterjee, *Merchants, Politics and Society.*

73. Hari Charan Das, 'Chahar Gulzar Shujai', in Elliot and Dowson, *The History of India by its Own Historians,* vol. 8, pp. 223–5, 229.

74. S.N. Mukherjee, *Sir William Jones: A Study in Eighteenth Century British Attitudes to India*, Bombay, 1983; David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization, 1773–1835,* Berkeley, 1969; Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, and others.

75. Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India*, pp. 4–8.

6

The English East India Company
Reflections on Mughal Traditions of Governance

This chapter focuses on a range of English language accounts of India's and Bengal's past which were composed during the mid to later eighteenth century. Chronologically they occupy the same period as many of the Persian tarikhs, the Mangalkavyas, and the Bengali prose narratives discussed in the preceding chapters. The English narratives in question can also be located within a broad spectrum of colonial discourses and commentaries about India, which stretch from the eighteenth into the twentieth century. British colonialist discourses about India, spanning several centuries, and various phases of colonial rule, exhibit different features and concerns befitting a body of narratives which practically parallel the duration of the British Raj in India. The focus here is on the English language accounts which were produced mostly during the period of decline of the later Mughal political order in Bengal and the transformation of the English East India Company into the sovereign ruler of a large part of eastern India as a prelude to the extension of its empire to other parts of the subcontinent. Many of these English accounts of the late eighteenth century were based on Persian tarikhs and Sanskrit texts and their authors interacted closely with Indian scholars familiar with Persian as well as pundits well-versed in Sanskrit. Several Englishmen who composed these narratives had acquired a familiarity—in cases even a degree of proficiency—with Sanskrit, Persian, and contemporary regional vernaculars, especially Bengali and Hindustani. Much of the attention devoted to colonialist accounts of Indian historiography by current scholarship focuses on nineteenth and twentieth century colonialist narratives about

different aspects of India's past. The narratives which are central to this chapter are significant because they present a contrast to the colonialist historiography of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They also embody a phase in the evolution of colonialist discourse about India when the tendency to marginalize and look down upon Indian traditions of writing about the past had either not crystallized, or had not yet acquired the strength and conviction that it did later.

Context and Imperative

Thomas R. Trautmann was probably right when he cautioned that the too facile tendency to equate knowledge and power carried the risk of devaluing the intellectual pursuits undertaken by the English in India together with the results of these pursuits.[1] But, it is equally true that the spate of colonialist narratives about India produced during the later eighteenth century were predicated on the conviction that the dramatic transformation in the nature of the Company, from merchant to 'merchant-sovereign', made it much more imperative to have knowledge about its newly acquired dominion in India.[2]

The systematic intellectual exploration by the East India Company's employees of the languages, literatures, philosophy, and religion of ancient India, especially during the Governor-generalship of Warren Hastings (1773–85), comprises one of the most-studied aspects of British colonial history in India. These scholars focused their intellectual endeavours mainly on ancient Indian judicial and cultural traditions which could be drawn upon as the Company grappled with the task of developing a judicial code and cultural policy for its subjects in Bengal. What is very rarely acknowledged by current scholarship is that this scenario in Bengal also generated an intense scrutiny and exploration by East India Company employees of the purely political and governmental dimensions of India's past

This particular strand of intellectual exploration, in many cases, slightly predated the celebrated findings of orientalists such as Colebrooke, Halhed, and others who were primarily interested in gaining insights and knowledge about ancient India. It is not as though the English authors who were interested in the governmental aspects of India's past kingdoms and empires were indifferent to the need of knowing and understanding better the religion, philosophy, and social customs of the vast majority of 'gentoos'. In fact, as will be seen later, it was quite the contrary. Many of the earliest colonialist authors about

India's past such as Robert Orme, Alexander Dow, William Bolts, Luke Scrafton, and others, however, attached greater weight and importance to accounts of India's past rulers in their narratives—especially Mughal rulers and their principles and institutions of governance. According to these writers, the East India Company, on the verge of taking up the reigns of government in Bengal, needed a clear insight into the political and governmental aspects of India's more recent past, particularly the Mughal empire and Mughal successor states in eighteenth century India, together with other regional kingships (for example, the Marathas) which existed in the subcontinent at that time. It was particularly important for the Company's authorities to have knowledge about the governmental and administrative institutions which these regimes had used and, in some cases, still continued to use. The Company also needed a perspective about where they stood in relation to emperors and rulers who held sway during India's medieval and early modern past. Some of these eighteenth century Indian states had recently been demolished or neutralized by the English Company; in others the English were still fashioning the modalities of political, military, and diplomatic engagements at multiple levels.

As the East India Company transformed itself rapidly from merchant to de facto ruler and eventually to the sovereign government of Bengal, intense and passionate debates were generated within Company circles in India and London about the reshaping, reform, and readjustment of its corporate structure and organization with regard to its changed status. The intra-Company debates and controversies were matched by equally tense debates about the Company within governmental circles in Britain.[3] In this highly charged and tense atmosphere, authors like Orme, Dow, Bolts, and others produced narratives about India's Mughal past with a view to using such information as ammunition to formulate arguments and views about the nature and future course of the East India Company in Bengal.[4] As will be seen below, some of these opinions were formed by a genuine admiration of and interest in Mughal and later Mughal history, but others, not surprisingly, had personal axes to grind.[5] The principal relevance of these English language narratives for this work lies in the fact that they provide accounts of Mughal systems of governance and, more importantly, in the conclusions that were derived from these.

Many (but not all) of the authors of these narratives regarded the advancement of the East India Company's interests in India as part of a much wider process of the expansion of European military, commercial,

and political power worldwide.[6] The awareness of a global/European context for the Company's achievements in India meant that its emergence as a political entity in India was perceived as a victory against European competitors and rivals such as the French and Portuguese, and also against Indian political regimes represented by the nawabs of Murshidabad in Bengal, for example. These Company employees also sought to locate the story of Islamic rule, and particularly Mughal rule, in India in the context of a much broader theme of the expansion and proliferation of the military/political power of Islam. The specific origins of Mughal rule in India and their tradition of governance were repeatedly traced back to the Mongols under Chengiz Khan. Thus the Mughals and their accomplishments in 'Indostan' were a regional chapter in a bigger story of how the Mongols and the various kingdoms and principalities which had originated from Mongol conquests were governed.

A Preoccupation with the Mughals and their 'Institutes' of Government

Almost all the English language narratives of the late eighteenth century which were preoccupied with governmental issues expressed unqualified admiration for the Mughals and their system of governance. William Bolts described the Mughal government as 'moderate and mild' and highly praised the Mughals for their support of trade and manufacture.[7] What especially impressed him was the fact that the Mughal emperors encouraged 'the commercial intercourses of other nations with the natives of Hindostan'.[8] Other aspects of Mughal rule which impressed Bolts were the 'just and humane' laws of the empire, its reasonable rates of taxation, and the concern of the rulers for the welfare and prosperity of their subjects. Other writers like Harry Verelst, William Kirkpatrick, Luke Scrafton, and Francis Gladwin also expressed their admiration for the 'high' age of Mughal rule which was usually identified as the period which began with Babur—and more particularly with Akbar—and ended more or less with the death of Aurangzeb.[9] In Scrafton's words, 'there was scarce a better administered government in the world'.[10] One particular feature which stood out and impressed the English authors was the policy of religious tolerance introduced by Akbar. Bolts, writing from the perspective of someone who was associated with a European trading company, remarked that the Mughal rulers did not concern themselves much about 'the religion either of their own Indian subjects or of those who traded with them'.[11]

The interest of the East India Company observers in the policies and principles of Mughal imperial governance, or the 'institutes' of Mughal rule can provide grounds for a modification of prevailing notions of not only Mughal but also, more broadly, 'Asiatic' or 'oriental' governance. This issue has been discussed further in the chapter.

A recurring feature in some of these narratives is the tendency to refer to the Mughals as people who were not indigenous to India. Robert Orme, for example, repeatedly treats the Muslims or 'Moors' of India separately from the 'Gentoos' and refers to the former as settlers and conquerors.[12] One wonders whether the references to the Mughals as settlers, conquerors, and outsiders may also have had something to do with English concerns in India during this period. The characterization of the Mughals as outsiders, who nevertheless successfully created an empire in India, carried with it an implicit reassurance that perhaps, though not indigenous to India, the English Company too might succeed in laying the foundation of a viable empire here. Moreover, the success of the Mughals in winning the affection and loyalty of their subjects (at least during the heydays of the empire) was a good portent for the English Company since it also carried the suggestion that Indians had prior experience of being ruled by 'outsiders' and, therefore, might be amenable to accepting the Company's rule.

In most of these colonialist accounts the interest and admiration for the Mughal empire, at the peak of its power and prestige, was intended to be a background to the topic of greater immediate relevance and interest to them—the decline of the empire. In this regard, the cluster of early colonialist accounts comes very close to the Indian authors of the Persian tarikhs who have been discussed in Chapter 5. These two groups of writers also betrayed another common preoccupation (though not necessarily identical perspectives) in their writings, that is, the rise of the English East India Company's empire in India. In fact, these two processes were seen as connected to each other. A perception which looms large in most of the English language narratives of the mid-eighteenth century is that the weakness and decline of the Mughal empire created conditions which facilitated—indirectly at least—the ascension of the Company to the position of political and territorial power. As these English employees of the Company saw it, the process of Mughal decline and the consequences generated by it were still playing themselves out in late eighteenth century India, and the Company had become both a participant in this complicated political scenario as well as an arbiter of sorts in it. So, the current and

ongoing relevance of Mughal imperial decline generated considerable analysis and discussion.

There are interesting similarities in the efforts of English commentators like Orme, Holwell, Dow, and others to delineate the causes of Mughal decline with that of the Persian tarikh writers of the eighteenth century. Like the latter, these English authors also identified the incompetence of the later Mughal emperors as one of the prime reasons for decline.[13] The other equally important cause was the cessation of different parts of the empire as autonomous states. Dow and Orme were strongly censorious of high-ranking Mughal noblemen such as the Nizam-ul-Mulk, Saadat Ali Khan, and the Bengal nawabs[14] whose pursuit of self-interest as well as their disloyalty and treachery towards the empire resulted in the autonomy of large and important Mughal provinces in the Deccan, Awadh, and Bengal.[15] He also viewed the nawabs of Bengal as usurpers and operators who did not have distinguished family or career backgrounds prior to their seizure of control over Bengal.[16] Most of the colonialist narratives date the beginning of Mughal decline to the period following Aurangzeb's death in 1707; or to the invasion of India by Nadir Shah in 1738. These English authors also clearly recognized that Mughal decline made possible the emergence and strengthening of regional powers whose origins were different from those of Mughal breakaway states such as Awadh or Bengal. Among such powers were Haider Ali in Mysore, and the Marathas who were regarded with good reason as the most formidable Indian power of that time. As seen in the previous chapter, many of the tarikh writers also regarded the formation of autonomous states by former Mughal mansabdars as one of the chief causes of imperial decline. The difference lay in the fact that most tarikh writers did not view the consequences of this development to be uniformly negative; whereas most—but not all—of the English language commentators did.

The Concept of Asiatic/Oriental Despotism: A Modification

A strong theme that runs through the narratives of these English authors and their reflections about the Mughal empire is that of Oriental or Asiatic despotism. Despite the positive evaluation given by most of them to the system of governance under the great Mughals, the authors of these accounts almost always identified Mughal governance specifically—and 'Asiatic' or 'oriental' modes of governance more

generally—as despotic. William Bolts, as noted above, had nothing but strong admiration for the Mughal government, particularly till the rule of Aurangzeb. Yet he also referred to the fact that there was a long tradition of tyranny and 'extreme despotism' flourishing in Hindustan.[17] In fact, when placed beside the many glowing tributes paid to Mughal rule, the concurrent characterization of it as despotic does indeed appear contradictory. This contradiction can perhaps be unravelled at one level by examining the modified interpretation of despotism offered by many of these authors. The endeavour to offer a modification to prevailing European notions of oriental despotism is discussed below. The second factor which could explain the overarching conviction that most forms of government prevailing in Asia were despotic in nature is the tradition of discourse on this subject among European intellectuals. As is well known, the concept of oriental despotism had a long genealogy in Europe and can be traced as far back as Aristotle. As Thomas Metcalf writes, 'this concept became a way of setting off people like themselves, conceived off as "Europeans", from those conceived off as "Asians", who, in their view, willingly submitted to "absolutism".'[18] This concept resurfaced in European intellectual discourse during the eighteenth century when philosophers like Montesquieu and Voltaire sought to use the notion of oriental despotism as a framing device to characterize 'oriental' societies and their governments, but also as something that very crucially distinguished Europeans from people in Asia. As thinkers like Montesquieu and Voltaire sought to fight the growth of royal absolutism, they deployed the concept of oriental despotism as something that also had to be feared and prevented from rearing its ugly head in Europe. Thus, for writers like Dow, Orme, Bolts, and others the association between India and despotism was probably something they had derived from the prevailing intellectual climate in Europe.

Despotism represented a form of government which had 'no laws, no [institution of private] property, and hence its peoples no rights'.[19] In other words, despotism by itself was seen as a scenario in which an absolute ruler wielded complete and arbitrary authority unchecked by a legal system, a written constitution, or other considerations. There were some efforts to explore the possible reasons for the proliferation of despotism in India and more widely in the 'orient'. Some eighteenth century English commentators attributed despotism to India's enervating climate and the religious principles of both Hinduism and Islam.[20] In the perception of some of these writers—Robert

Orme and Alexander Dow, for example, the culture and teachings of Islam in particular encouraged despotic forms of government.[21] The despotism prevalent in the political and public spheres was further reproduced within the family where it was manifest in practices such as slavery, the suppression of women, and a host of other customs.[22] The proclivity to link despotic tendencies in Indian political systems to Indian religions and climate, and other factors, continued to recur in British colonialist discourses about India long after the eighteenth century was over. The narratives discussed here represent some of the early colonialist speculations on the origins of despotism in this part of the world. Theories regarding despotism, particularly the tendency to link it to the culture and teachings of Islam, can also be traced back to European views on Islam going back to medieval times.[23] But in the context of Mughal India, they did not go unchallenged by English commentators who professed different views on this topic.[24] But, it is significant that positive evaluations of classic Mughal governance were counterposed to the conviction that it was nevertheless a tyrannical, despotic mode of rule.

Despite the strong conviction that pre-British traditions of governance in India were inevitably authoritarian and despotic, one of the most significant by-products to emerge from this cluster of eighteenth century English language narratives was a much more modified and nuanced notion of Oriental or Asiatic despotism, especially as applied to the Mughal empire and to Mughal successor states in India. While the idea of oriental despotism as a central trope of British colonial characterizations of Indian political culture (or rather, its lack) is well-known, the modification of this concept by a group of early colonialist commentators has gone unacknowledged for the most part.[25] The Sanskrit-proficient orientalism of Halhed, Colebrooke, and others has come to be seen as representative of the dominant face of British orientalism in India; whereas the Persian-proficient orientalism of Alexander Dow, Francis Gladwin, William Kirkpatrick, and others has received remarkably little scholarly attention. Yet it constitutes an important strand in the evolution and crystallization of British colonial understanding of India. Secondly, it illuminates a category of orientalist learning which was distinct from the ancient Indian culture and history-oriented Sanskritic learning of Halhed, Colebrooke, and others.

It is true that the modified, nuanced, and sympathetic interpretation of Oriental/Asiatic despotism and its application to Mughal institutions was not long-lived. This is eloquently illustrated by the comments made

about Muslim/Mughal rule in India by James Mill and by Sir Henry Elliot.[26] But, the demise and atrophy of this strand of Persianized orientalism and the Mughal-centric preoccupation of its authors by the early nineteenth century actually tells us a lot about the evolution and change in the circumstances and attitude of the English in India towards India's Mughal past and the political and cultural traditions associated with it. The Company's success in expanding and consolidating its status as a political/territorial power in India by the early decades of the nineteenth century meant that its policy makers no longer felt it necessary to refer to their precursor empires and kingdoms in India for guidance regarding the shaping of colonial governance. Besides, the first round of institution-creation by the English Company for its early dominion in eastern India had been accomplished for the moment by the early nineteenth century, and as Ranajit Guha, Robert Travers, and others have shown, these were not predominantly shaped by Mughal precedent.[27] Travers' work has established that there were English voices which had articulated the need to refer to Mughal precedent, but such voices had not always prevailed when the institutions characteristic of the early colonialist regime had actually been formed and implemented.

The actual arguments advanced by English writers in their modified and nuanced understanding of oriental/Mughal despotism fall under two broad heads. The first argument was that all Indian governments, Hindu as well as Muslim and certainly the Mughal form of governance, were despotic. But, such despotism could be tempered and its ill-effects could be neutralized by the individual ability and judgement of a good and upright, but absolutist ruler. Alexander Dow thus wrote, 'the misfortunes of half an age of tyranny are removed in a few years under the mild administration of a just prince'.[28] According to this line of argument, many of the Mughal rulers, especially between and including Akbar and Aurangzeb, had provided good, humane, and benign rule over their vast empire. Such sentiments were also echoed by Francis Gladwin and by William Kirkpatrick.[29] Thus, despotism by itself was not at all a desirable form of government; however, an enlightened despot could render it efficient and humane. The second line of argument advanced by these writers was that in addition to having had the good fortune to experience the reigns of a series of just and capable rulers, Mughal rule was actually founded upon certain 'institutes' of governance and perhaps even a 'constitution'. Proponents of this view actually situated Mughal rule against a longer and broader tradition associated with the

Mongols and their descendants in other parts of Asia, to conclude that the governments formed by these people could not actually be called despotisms since they were all characterized by identifiable principles of governance as well as customs. Since the Mughals saw themselves as descendants of the Mongols, they too valued the importance of ruling according to prior precedents and customs.[30]

Gladwin eulogized the achievements of Akbar as well as the latter's 'most able minister' Abul Fazl in recording the foundational 'institutes' of Mughal rule. Gladwin identified the most important principles behind such institutes as regard for the security of life and property of the humblest peasant, religious tolerance, and concern for 'the rights of humanity'.[31] In Gladwin's estimation, it was especially remarkable that Akbar had been able to transcend what the former described as the 'intolerant spirit' of the Islamic faith and instead demonstrate his commitment to publicizing the foundational principles of his government via the *Ain-i-Akbari*.[32] In doing so, Akbar transcended the 'prevailing maxims of despotism'.[33] These principles, according to Gladwin, were adhered to overall by Akbar's successors on the Mughal throne until the time of Aurangzeb, when again major innovations and reforms were carried out with regard to the principles of governance. Alexander Dow also referred to 'the constitution of Hindostan'[34] and by it he denoted the system of governance which had prevailed under the Mughals together with its clearly defined principles, institutions, offices, and customs.[35] The testimony of the French traveller Francois Bernier, who had travelled through the Mughal empire during the seventeenth century, was believed to have publicized the view that no private property rights existed in Mughal India because the emperor was the sole proprietor of all the land.[36] As noted above, the absence of a secure right to private property was regarded as one of the defining features of a despotic and arbitrary government. This view was vigorously challenged by several of the eighteenth century English commentators on India including Gladwin[37] and Scrafton.[38] Thus there was a vigorous effort to modify the picture of an uncontrolled and absolutist government in India under the Mughals. Other writers pointed out that there were clear constraints on the abuse and misuse of power even by absolute rulers. Kirkpatrick referred to the danger of 'seasonable insurrection' if absolute rulers rode rough-shod over the wishes and sentiments of their subjects.[39] Dow believed that there was a very high degree of respect for men of letters in Mughal India and the Mughal emperors themselves 'stood in awe of their pens'.[40] From

this premise Dow came to the rather significant conclusion that in Mughal India despotic government was constrained up to a point by the power of scholars and writers who could record for posterity the actions and policies of rulers.[41] 'It is a proverb in the East,' observed Dow, 'that the monarchs of Asia were more afraid of the pen of Abul Fazil than they were afraid of the sword of Akbar'.[42] Dow may have overstated his point. But it is certainly significant that Dow and many other East India Company-affiliated writers had formulated a spirited rebuttal and modification of the concept of despotism particularly with regard to its application to Mughal India. Despite the rebuttal, however, Dow himself would make a retreat of sorts from his above-mentioned views to lament the fact that in the last analysis the laws and institutions of the Mughal empire, although not non-existent, were not strong enough. They could not compensate for the weakness and incapacity of individual rulers. Dow pointed to the specific case of the Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah and said that the latter's reign may not have turned out to be such a disaster if the institutions of Mughal rule had been stronger.[43]

The articulation of a nuanced understanding of despotism in the Mughal empire was combined by these English commentators with an attempt to provide a historical grounding for Mughal administration through an attempt to reconstruct traditions of governance under the Mongols and Mongol-derived kingdoms in other parts of the Islamic world. This further reinforces the view that the Mughals, as well as the Mongols from whom they were descended, had never been practitioners of unchecked and oppressive absolutism. William Kirkpatrick's contribution to the *New Asiatic Miscellany* (1789) embodies a strong endeavour in this direction. Kirkpatrick starts out by first refuting the view that Islam as a religion did not encourage a proclivity towards despotism. In his view neither the Koran, nor commentaries on it, endorsed despotic rule. On the contrary both emphasized the need to sustain social harmony and the rights of individuals together with the authority of rulers. Kirkpatrick went so far as to say that the importance given to these objectives by Islamic tradition were stronger than 'the jurisprudence of some nations of Europe which boast to be infinitely more enlightened and refined'.[44] Secondly, he points out the tradition of scholarship in Islamic societies which placed a high degree of importance on the reciprocal duties of the subject and the ruler. This tradition assigned particular weight to the need for the ruler and his government to conform to previous usages and regulations since they

had acquired the status of political traditions.[45] Kirkpatrick believed that there were also concrete examples of written laws which had been promulgated in Asia or the East by various ruling regimes of the past. He refers specifically to the Yassa of Chengiz Khan, the 'institutes' of Timur, and the 'regulations' of Akbar[46] and suggests that the first two, in particular, might have been framed in a sort of 'diet or general assembly', and that all of them were diffused as widely as possible in an age when printing was unknown.[47] The focal point of his essay is a discussion of the 'institutes' of prince Ghazan Khan, a descendant of Chengiz Khan, who ruled over Persia during the late thirteenth century.[48] The 'institutes' of Ghazan Khan referred to by Kirkpatrick include declarations about the need to ensure an incorruptible and fair judicial system, the need to appoint learned and wise persons as judges, the need to reduce the power and influence of the nobility on judges, and the need to prevent royal officials from extorting the subjects.[49] The examples of the 'institutes' of Ghazan Khan need to be seen in the context of the 'institutes' of Akbar (the *Ain-i-Akbari* of Abul Fazl) which were translated into English, probably for the first time, by Francis Gladwin. As seen above, Gladwin had highly praised Akbar's efforts to publicize the principles of his government among his subjects through authorizing Abul Fazl to compose the *Ain-i-Akbari*. Kirkpatrick, however, seeks to draw a line connecting a Mughal 'constitution', which he believed existed, to the 'regulations' or 'institutes' of Ghazan Khan, and then linking both to the institutes of Timur. Timur's institutes, according to this author, functioned as 'the code of ancient usages so often recognized by the later monarchs of Hindostan as a constitutional rule of conduct'.[50] It is also significant that English writers like Dow, Gladwin, and Kirkpatrick who spoke in terms of a Mughal constitution were all Persian scholars of considerable ability. They were familiar with Persian literature, including accounts of past rulers and their modes of governance, and their views on the existence of written 'institutes' of Mughal or Mongol governance were derived directly from the authors of Persian accounts.

These English narratives, however, made a distinction between the classic or 'high' Mughal age, which most of them identified as having ended with the reign of Aurangzeb and if not, then definitely with Nadir Shah's invasion in 1738 and the period following it. There seems to have been a consensus in these narratives that factors which had acted as deterrents to despotic behaviour by emperors during the peak period of Mughal prestige and glory had effectively dissolved during

the eighteenth century when the empire itself was in decline.[51] In the perspective of several English writers such as Alexander Dow, William Bolts, and Robert Orme, it was the new rulers in many of the Mughal successor states who indulged in the rampant and unchecked practice of despotism during the eighteenth century.[52] Dow called Mughal successor states like Bengal a 'mock form of empire' and persisted in calling its rulers 'usurpers'.[53] Bolts too discussed in detail how the autonomous nawabs of Bengal had actually subverted the Mughal mode of governance and disturbed the balance which had existed among different branches of administration according to the classic tenets of Mughal rule.[54] Thus, even if despotism had been tempered and made humane under the rule of the great Mughal emperors, particularly from Akbar to Aurangzeb, it reigned unchecked in the conditions created by Mughal decline.

But here too, Bolts and Dow, while sticking to their conviction that eighteenth century India was a fertile ground for the proliferation of despotism, offered significant modifications—amounting almost to revocations—in their evaluation of the Bengal nawabs whom they had earlier branded as corrupt and tyrannical usurpers. The reason for this shift in judgement was tied ultimately to the political agendas of both Bolts and Dow vis-à-vis the presence of the East India Company in Bengal and to the motivations that led both of them to write their respective narratives in the first place. Both men had reasons to paint the East India Company's regime in Bengal in a negative light, and to drive that point home, both were prepared to concede that the Bengal nawabs who had ruled the region prior to the Company may have had some redeeming accomplishments. Dow admitted in contradiction to his prior statements that the Bengal nawabs practised the 'mild despotism' associated with the Mughals and that Bengal had prospered greatly while they sat on the masnad at Murshidabad.[55] He admitted too that although despotism was not supposed to be conducive to it, trade and commerce had flourished under the reigns of the autonomous nawabs of Bengal.[56]

There were many points of similarity in the issues that preoccupied the Indian authors of Persian tarikhs discussed in the previous chapter and those embodied in the English language narratives discussed here. The tarikh writers took as their premise the conviction that the classic Mughal tradition of governance had been based on just and noble principles and their narratives were intended to persuade the new masters of Bengal, that is, the English Company, of the need to emulate

Mughal precedent. The English authors of the eighteenth century narratives also deployed Mughal history and their nuanced/modified interpretation regarding the existence of a Mughal 'constitution' to fight their political and ideological battles within and around East India Company circles both in Britain and India. Many of the tarikh writers, however, were inclined to view the rulers of Mughal successor states of the eighteenth century as custodians of Mughal political ideals rather than predominantly as usurpers and subverters. But here too, as seen above, English views were not entirely consistent.

Despotism, the Mughal Precedent, and the Company's State

The invocation of a Mughal past was intended as a reference point to determine the shape and contours of the emergent East India Company's state in the region. Commentators such as Dow, Gladwin, and Kirkpatrick used their conviction in the existence of a Mughal 'constitution', which was grounded in principles of just governance, to advocate the argument that the Company's administrative institutions in Bengal should be shaped with reference to those of Mughal times.[57] They did not necessarily advocate that any governmental practice that could be tracked to the Mughal system needed to be implemented in the Company's state without modification or reservation. Kirkpatrick, for example, argued for a thorough and open-minded review of Mughal practices. This would allow the Company to determine if certain Mughal institutions could be introduced into its recently acquired dominion and also to ascertain what modifications and alterations needed to be made to them.[58]

Other writers such as Dow and Bolts, in particular, used their studies to formulate arguments ranging from the takeover of the East India Company's dominions in India by the British government to the outright conquest of all of India by the East India Company. Interestingly the spectre of oriental despotism was invoked now in order to buttress all these different shades of opinions. These writers—and Orme too can be counted with them in this regard—were all stringent critics of the East India Company's behaviour in Bengal ever since it acquired political dominance in 1757, but more particularly after its acquisition of the diwani of Bengal from the Mughal emperor in 1765. There were definitely political reasons for Dow and Bolts to publicly lash out at what they represented as the East India Company's gross misgovernment and corruption in Bengal.[59] All of them agreed that Bengal's economic prosperity had plummeted, especially since 1765,

because of the unchecked rapacity of the Company's servants there, particularly with regard to their aggressive and uncontrolled conduct of private trading.[60] Other instances of misgovernment by the English Company were also strongly denounced. These ranged from the virtual obliteration of the principle of free trade (also regarded as one of the crucial elements in a system of enlightened government) and the total 'eradication' of civil justice.[61] From this basic premise of the Company's misrule in Bengal, Dow and Bolts made very different, but equally bold suggestions about the future course of action where India was concerned. Both suggestions involved invocations of the notion of despotism.

Alexander Dow believed that in the anarchic and unstable state of affairs which prevailed in eighteenth century India, the most desirable course of action in terms of the interests of the British nation lay in the outright conquest of all of India by the English East India Company. Dow presented a knowledgeable and remarkably insightful sketch of the political configuration of eighteenth century India[62] which included the various regional states as well as the moribund Mughal empire which existed, at this time, practically in name only and argued that in political and military terms such a conquest was 'not only practicable but easy'.[63] In Dow's vision, following such a conquest, the Company could 'maintain it [that is, India] for ages as an appanage of the British crown'.[64] Dow listed the great material benefits which would accrue to the British nation from the Company's conquest of the Indian subcontinent (it would help to pay off Britain's national debt, cause an influx of wealth into Britain, and such others). The moral rationale for this plan of conquest, however, returned to the issue of despotism. In Dow's opinion, a plan for the conquest of the Indian subcontinent would not amount to an immoral act since it would result in the liberation of Indians who were being oppressed by tyrannical and despotic rulers who had seized power during the decline of the Mughal rule. As subjects of the East India Company's rule, Indians would experience the benefits of a government 'founded upon the principles of virtue and justice'.[65] These pronouncements of Dow which occur in the second volume of his *History of Hindostan* run counter to his statements in volume three of the same work where he depicted the Company's regime in Bengal in far from positive terms. These contradictions in the views expressed in the three separate volumes of Dow's *History of Hindostan* reflect the changing priorities of Dow himself over the course of a few years. What is significant for us here is to take note of how the trope of despotism was being utilized to advocate a blueprint for an East India Company

empire not just in Bengal, but including all of India during the later eighteenth century.

William Bolts also fell back on the trope of despotism, but he did so in very different terms from those espoused by Alexander Dow. Bolts used his powerful critique of the Company's regime in Bengal to advance the thesis that the Company's political position in Bengal was itself politically dubious. Secondly, the English Company in Bengal was itself behaving like an oriental or Asiatic despot, and it was therefore necessary for the British government to step in and put a terminal halt to this state of affairs. Bolts depicted the nawabs of Bengal as illegitimate usurpers who had seized power over the region in questionable ways; he also portrayed the 'grand Mogul' as emperor only in name and as someone who was essentially a puppet in the hands of the English Company.[66] Thus any political status or rights bestowed on the Company by the Mughal emperor (this was an obvious reference to the bestowal of the office of diwan on the East India Company by the Mughal emperor Shah Alam in 1765) were politically invalid.[67]

Bolts also advanced the view that there were no serious problems as long as the English Company was a purely trading corporation in India and was required to abide by the laws of various Indian governments who were strong enough to enforce them. The genesis of the current problem lay in the transformation of the Company into a political entity in India during the later eighteenth century.[68] Thus, the despotism deemed to be endemic to Indian governments was now being practised by an English corporation-cum-ruling power. Bolts sought examples from other parts of the world to assert that trading aristocracies (he identified the English East India Company in these terms) were wont to abuse power and referred to examples of Venice and Genoa during the medieval and early modern periods for confirmation.[69] He went on to further raise the spectre of the East India Company and its politics, factionalism, and corruption leading up to a situation in which British national interests might be jeopardized.[70] Bolts painted a scenario in which rich and unscrupulous people (a thinly veiled attack on rich 'nabobs' such as Clive, for example, who had become the subjects of much controversy and scandal in eighteenth century Britain) might seize control over the affairs of the East India Company; worse still, 'foreigners may combine and by engrossing much [Company] stock...endanger the Asiatick territorial possessions and therewith the India trade of this nation'.[71] Thus the despotism and corruption of the Company, in Bolts's representation, could stretch to a point where British national interests

were actually threatened. Bolts did not say so explicitly, but in touching upon such a concern he was deliberately perhaps stoking current fears in certain British circles that the corruption and immorality of the East India Company's government in Bengal might corrupt and taint the British body politic as well. Bolts's ultimate condemnation of the East India Company in Bengal was embodied perhaps in his description of it as the 'worst of the ancient Black nabobs'.[72]

Ancient India: Culture, Ethnography, and Historiography

As noted at the outset of this chapter, early colonialist explorations of ancient Indian religion and culture, as well as other ethnographic aspects of Indian society, are extremely well-known. A large body of scholarly literature has not only enriched our understanding of the findings of colonialist officials in India during the eighteenth century, but has also raised important questions about the nature and content of colonial knowledge about India as well as the character of the interactive dynamics between Indian scholars and British orientalists during this period.[73] The work of particularly well known Sanskrit-proficient orientalists such as William Jones and others of the Warren Hastings era are too well known to merit repetition here. It is relevant though to briefly review the views of Persian-proficient East India Company officials about ancient India. The Mughal-centric interests of these English authors occupied the central focus of their narratives. But almost all of them made observations about Indian society and culture, that is, mainly Hindu society and culture, because they felt that such knowledge was indispensable not just for English territorial acquisitions in India, but also for the conduct of its valuable trade in India.[74]

The interest in Indian or Hindu philosophy, religion, and culture derived mainly from Sanskrit materials or from the Sanskrit-proficiency of orientalist scholars. But the entry of yet another group of British orientalists into studies and commentaries about the religion, culture, and social practices of Hindu Indians occurred through Persian language materials as well as materials in various Indian vernacular languages. A good example of this is Alexander Dow. He studied Sanskrit in Benares but then stopped it to commence the study of Persian.[75] It is quite obvious that he had considerable familiarity with Persian literature and his access to insights about Hindu society, religion, and accounts of past kings occurred via translations of such materials into Persian.[76] Halhed

also apparently knew Persian well and his best-known achievement—the translation into English of 'A Code of Gentoo Laws'—had resulted from a circuitous process whereby the Sanskrit compilation of the code by indigenous scholars, well-versed in Sanskrit, was translated into Persian. Halhed had then translated the Persian version of the code into English.[77]

Officials of the Company who were Persian-proficient identified Sanskrit-language texts (often identified by them in general terms as shastra) as repositories of information about and insights into the 'civil history' of ancient, or Hindu, India which was deemed to include the 'language, literature, philosophy, religion, law, ethics, sciences, architecture and the arts' of that period.[78] Secondly, their views showed a degree of respect and admiration for these aspects of ancient Indian society and culture. This is seen in the narratives of J.Z. Holwell, William Bolts, Alexander Dow, and others. The obvious antiquity of Indian civilization greatly impressed commentators such as these and they were keen to make comparisons of it with other antique civilizations such as those of Egypt and Greece.[79] The religious and philosophical traditions of India were an obvious area of interest for these scholars, and topics such as the concept of the transmigration of the soul and the different schools of Indian philosophy were discussed, as were forms of Indian social organization—particularly, the caste system and social practices such as sati. Many of the same English authors had identified a 'constitution' which they held the Mughal rulers had given their Indian subjects; they also identified a 'constitution' associated with ancient or Hindu India which embodied the civil laws and principles of that society. Dow associated the Hindu code of laws with the *nyaya* shastra.[80] Halhed proclaimed that there was a 'gentoo juripsrudence' which belied the common European view that Hindus had no written law codes.[81] As is well known, this notion of an ancient Hindu 'constitution' was to play an instrumental role in the type of judicial system introduced by the East India Company's regime in Bengal. What stands out, however, is the absence in these eighteenth century commentaries of the type of negative characterizations such as the ones found in the writings of Charles Grant or James Mill in the early decades of the next century. Actually, English authors such as Holwell took pains to emphasize that Hindus were not 'a race of stupid and gross idolators'.[82] There was also an effort to point out that stories of the idolatry and superstition of the Hindus had been disseminated particularly by European travellers to India and that these

proved nothing but 'their [European travellers'] talent for fable upon the mysterious religion of Hindostan'.[83] Indeed as P.J. Marshall points out, the views of British orientalist commentators of the eighteenth century about various aspects of Hinduism stand out in their distinction from those of the great mass of Europeans (mainly travellers) whose attitudes on Indian religion and culture were strongly coloured by ridicule or disgust.[84] Holwell remarked that the tendency to profess negative views about ancient Indian/Hindu culture could be attributed to those Europeans 'whose knowledge of states and kingdoms extends no further than the limits of their native land, often imagine all beyond it, scarce worth their thoughts or at least greatly inferior in comparison with their own...'.[85]

Although the quest for purely governmental traditions was not predominant in these early orientalist investigations into ancient Indian culture, this topic surfaced nevertheless as a by-product of the former: accounts of ancient Indian kings were seen as part of the religious traditions or 'shaster' of the Hindus. Several of the eighteenth century orientalists including Alexander Dow and William Jones, referred to genealogies or 'catalogues' of ancient Indian kings.[86] Ancient Indian or Hindu notions of time and chronology were also discussed and commented upon by several of these writers.[87] This notion of chronology which was characterized by enormous spans and units of time such as *manus*, *yugas*, and the like amazed and overwhelmed scholars such as Jones and Halhed. But they were neither dismissive nor belittling of this scheme or of the Hindu concept of the world's origin and the configuration of its geography. On the other hand, Halhed believed that the ancient Hindu notion of the earth's chronology tallied very exactly with those mentioned by Moses.[88] These attitudes contrast significantly with the well-known views of James Mill and Macaulay in the nineteenth century. Mill for instance characterized the ancient Indian concept of time as 'fable' which stood in the 'place of fact'.[89]

Concept of History and Methodology

The eighteenth century narratives produced by English authors associated with the early colonial regime in India seem to have mirrored several of the dominant trends in history writing prevalent at the time in Britain and more generally in Europe. Their explorations into Mughal and later Mughal history, as we have seen, emphasized the chronological reigns of kings and their governmental accomplishments.

This tendency establishes a connection between these Mughal-centric writings about India and what has been described as the tradition of annalistic writing which characterized historical writing in seventeenth and early eighteenth century France and Britain. The English commentaries discussed in this chapter are marked most strongly by a commitment to recounting strictly linear chronological events of past times and, secondly, by the conviction that history was primarily a record of kings and their governmental activities. J.S. Grewal establishes a link between this feature and the philosophy of Gibbon that 'wars and the administration of public affairs were the principal subjects of history'.[90] Such views were also often reiterated in English journals of the eighteenth century.[91] The narratives of Robert Orme, Alexander Dow, and several other eighteenth century authors who wrote commentaries on India bear testimony to this feature. The strong emphasis on chronology was paralleled by the concern that historical records would be flawed and incomplete if there were gaps in the chronological records of past times. Chronology was intended as the structuring device of history—it would provide the framework for the facts which would supply its substance. A great deal of care was taken to ascertain the accuracy of facts, usually in the form of references to authorities or sources from which they had been derived. The type of narratives showcased in this chapter tended to identify their authorities as accounts of earlier European travellers to India (for example, Francois Bernier), as well as near-contemporary European and British orientalists such as Anquetil du Perron, Herbelot, and James Fraser. Materials that today's historians describe as 'primary sources' were also invoked—these ranged from actual documents such as treaties and charters to copies of correspondence among personalities who played key roles in the events—the commentaries of William Bolts and George Vansittart comprise apt examples of this. Sometimes factual information had been derived through personal communication—including possibly verbal communication—between the authors of these commentaries and persons who were knowledgeable about the topics featured. Orme's *History of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan*, according to Tammita-Delgoda, owed some of its factual foundation to Orme's personal friendship with Robert Clive.[92] Yet British and European historical writing of the eighteenth century also embodied a philosophy which was different from the annalistic tradition. The historical philosophy of Enlightenment writers such as Voltaire and Montesquieu aimed at transcending the mere cataloguing of events

and actions and instead laid emphasis on the 'underlying principles of human nature which they revealed'.[93] The authors of several of the Mughal-centric narratives in English explicitly acknowledged their debt to Persian language materials in composing these works.

Some of these narratives were direct translations from Persian materials—the best-known example perhaps was Alexander Dow's *History of Hindostan*, of which the first and second volumes were supposed to be a direct translation of Firishta's history. One can also mention in this context Francis Gladwin's translation of Akbar's 'institutes', among others. There were other works which were based largely on Persian accounts without necessarily being direct translations of the latter.[94] Those narratives which are direct translations from Persian materials are nevertheless extremely significant because of the valuable commentaries made by the English authors/translators about their understandings of history as well as about the historical value of the Persian materials they used as sources and authorities.

The cluster of English language narratives focussed on Mughal and late Mughal rulers and kingdoms, therefore, affords us an extremely significant glimpse into how two traditions of writing about the past—the Persian tarikh tradition and the eighteenth century English tradition of annalistic history—were brought into close interaction with each other, due to the circumstances surrounding the English presence in eighteenth century India and Bengal. It is difficult to find instances of a Persian tarikh or the author of a Persian tarikh commenting on the English 'style' of writing about past kings and their governments. The English writers, however, made valuable remarks about the Persian tarikhs used by them. What stands out is that the eighteenth century English writers arrived at the consensus that the Persain tarikhs containing chronological records of past kings and their governmental accomplishments constituted 'history'. The term 'history'—and not fable or myth—was actually used repeatedly to describe these Persian language materials. Alexander Dow described Firishta's work as 'the authentic history of a great empire'.[95] As seen in the previous chapter, the tarikh style was characterized also by a chronological arrangement of the reigns of kings and a discussion of their governmental and administrative accomplishments. Dow had some criticisms to offer about Firishta's writing—he felt that Firishta had overburdened his history with too many facts and it was not sufficiently counterbalanced by 'those reflections which give spirit and elegance to works of this kind'.[96] But nevertheless, in Dow's final evaluation, Firishta's work was characterized by a 'scrupulous attention to truth and

that manliness of sentiment which constitute the very essence of good history'.[97] He further praised Firishta's strength of judgement and his being 'divested of religious prejudices as he is of political flattery or fear' and declared that Firishta could be ranked among the 'best writers of the West'.[98] Thus, eighteenth century Persian-proficient British orientalists unreservedly described Persian traditions of writing about past rulers and governments as history.

There was nevertheless one major factor which, in the opinion of these English writers, separated European history-writing from the Indo-Persian style of history. Presaging by many centuries the views of Hayden White and others of his ilk, Dow proclaimed this factor to be the question of literary style. In his opinion, one of the principal differences between the 'correct taste of Europe' in matters of historical composition and what he had no hesitation in describing as the historical endeavours of Indo-Islamic authors lay in the matter of literary style.[99] There was an acknowledgement of the view prevalent among Western writers that poetry was not a suitable genre for historical composition, but neither was ornate and 'poetic prose'.[100] Tammita-Delgoda refers to a strand of opinion in eighteenth century Britain which frowned upon ornate prose as a suitable style for writing history.[101] Dow, although an admirer of Indo-Persian historiography, admitted that 'the diction of their historians [is] very diffuse and verbose....'[102] He certainly felt that Firishta's writing was marred by this trait, but so was Abul Fazl's prose.[103] But the issue of a problematic literary style did not, in Dow's view, create an insurmountable obstacle to the appreciation of Indo-Persian historiography. As he put it, he had 'in many places clipped the wings of Firishta's turgid expressions' to render the translated version of the latter's work more palatable for the English audience for whom the project had been undertaken in the first place.[104]

Many of these same writers, although quite admiring, respectful, and curious about ancient Indian historiographical traditions, espoused views about them that were different from their views about Indo-Persian historiography. The remarks of eighteenth century orientalists about ancient Indian historiogarphical traditions in particular tended to foreshadow later British colonialist scepticism and disdain about ancient Indian ability—or rather the lack of it—to write proper history. But these views still lacked the biting, sarcastic, and negative tone reminiscent mostly of nineteenth century colonialist discourse.

But others were far more sceptical about bestowing on ancient Indian historiographical traditions the label they had unhesitatingly given to

Indo-Persian tarikh tradition.[105] The issue of literary genre posed an even more serious problem when it came to viewing ancient Indian materials from a historiographical perspective. These materials too were often in the form of poetry and the objections regarding the use of poetry for historical writing have been noted above. As Dow remarked about the Mahabharata—'that work is a poem and not a history'.[106] Yet Dow had depended on Persian authorities for explanations about ancient Indian materials and believed that Indo-Persian authors often did not know enough about ancient Indian historiographical and cultural traditions and their commentaries might not be the most reliable ones.[107] He found it hard to believe that Hindus had no 'authentic history' and implied that perhaps a direct scholarly access to Sanskrit textual materials (which he did not possess) might yield a different impression.[108] Through the nineteenth century, even this attitude—that is, of trying to doubt the allegation that ancient India had no genuine historiographical tradition—would become increasingly scarce.

Thus, the English language narratives of the eighteenth century demonstrate an interesting bifurcation in their views on Mughal and late Mughal traditions of history writing and ancient Indian traditions of the same. The characterization of Indo-Persian tarikh traditions as 'historical' by several English commentators of this period provides for a dialogue of sorts between this chapter and its immediately preceding one. Also, both chapters uphold the striking similarities in the concept of history entertained by eighteenth century English authors and the Persianized Indian aristocrats who composed tarikhs.

Through the nineteenth century, the overall tendency in British colonialist discourse about India was to characterize Muslims—especially Muslim rulers—as particularly barbaric, brutal, and tyrannical.[109] The Mughals, though, sometimes merited a more generous and positive evaluation as, for example, at the hands of James Mill and Elphinstone.[110] But neither the interest in the Mughals, nor the overall positive view of their political achievements as well as traditions of history writing associated with them, were markedly noticeable in colonialist discourses about India in the later nineteenth century or in the period following it.

As the remark made by Sir Henry Elliot in the introduction to the multi-volume work associated with him shows, Muslim rule, including Mughal rule in India, was by now strongly associated with barbarity, despotic rule, and tyranny;[111] yet, interestingly enough, the Indo-Islamic tradition of historiography was rarely condemned as pure

fable or myth. Charles Stewart's history of Bengal published in the early nineteenth century was regarded as a landmark in its status as one of the first 'modern' histories of this region. Yet, as Stewart clarified at the very beginning of his work, his history was based on Persian tarikhs including the *Tabaqat-i-Nasiri*, Nizamuddin's *Tabaqat-i-Akbari*, Mohammed Qasim's (or Firishta) *Tarikh-i-Firishta*, Mirza Mohammed Kasim's *Alamgirnama*, and Ghulam Hussain Salim's *Riyaz-us-Salatin*.[112] Stewart's *History of Bengal* also became the model for some Bengali authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who wrote 'modern' histories of this region in the Bengali language.

Notes

1. Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India*, 1997, Berkeley, pp. 19–27.

2. William Bolts, *A Consideration of Indian Affairs Particularly Respecting the Present State of Bengal and its Dependencies*, London, 1772, p. vi.

3. H.V. Bowen, *Revenue and Reform: The Indian Problem in British Politics, 1757–1773,* Cambridge, 1991; P.J. Marshall, *Problems of Empire: Britain and India 1757–1813*, London, 1968; P.J. Marshall, *Bengal: The British Bridgehead*, Cambridge, 1987.

4. Robert Orme, *A View of the Military Transactions of the British Nation in Indostan from the Year MDCCXLV to which is Prefixed a Dissertation on the Establishments Made by Mahommedan Conquerors, in Indostan*, 3 vols, London, 1775–8; Bolts, *A Consideration*; Alexander Dow, *A History of Hindostan: Translated from the Persian*, 3 vols, London, 1792 (rpt).

5. A good example of this is provided by William Bolts, *A Consideration*; also Harry Verelst, *A View of the Rise, Progress and Present State of the English Government in Bengal*, in Patrick Tuck (ed.), *The East India Company: 1600–1858,* vol. 3, New York, 2000 (rpt), pp. 1–148.

6. Bolts, *A Consideration,* pp. 72–4; Ashoka Sinha Raja Tammita-Delgoda, 'Nabob, Historian and Orientalist: The Life and Writings of Robert Orme (1728–1801)', unpublished PhD dissertation, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, no date.

7. Bolts, *A Consideration,* p. 13.

8. Ibid.

9. Verelst, *A View*, p. 1; William Kirkpatrick, 'The Institutes of Ghazan Khan Emperor of the Moguls', in Francis Gladwin (ed.), *New Asiatick Miscellany,* Calcutta, 1789, pp. 167–9; Luke Scrafton, *Reflections on*

the Government of Indostan with a Short History of Bengal from MDCCXXXVIII to MDCCLVIII, London, 1770; Francis Gladwin, *The History of Hindostan during the Reigns of Jehangir, Shahjehan and Aurangzebe,* vol. 1, Calcutta, 1788.

10. Scrafton, *Reflections,* p. 24.

11. Bolts, *A Consideration,* p. 13.

12. Robert Orme, *Historical Fragments of the Mughal Empire: Of the Morattoes and of English Concerns in Indostan from the Year MDCLIX,* London, 1805.

13. Orme, *Indostan,* vol. 1, p. 20.

14. Dow specifically names Ali Vardi Khan. See Dow, *A History of Hindostan,* vol. 2, pp. 327–69.

15. Orme, *Indostan,* vol. 1, p. 20; Dow, *A History of Hindostan,* vol. 2, pp. 327–69; Bolts, *A Consideration,* pp. 3, 22, 32, 36.

16. Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 327–69.

17. Bolts, *A Consideration,* p. 16.

18. Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj,* Cambridge, 1995, p. 6.

19. Ibid., p. 7.

20. Bolts, *A Consideration,* p. 16.

21. See Orme, *Historical Fragments of the Mughal Empire* in particular.

22. Dow, *A History of Hindostan,* vol. 3, pp. ii, vi, xxii; Gladwin, *The History of Hindustan.,* vol. 1, p. iii.

23. Metcalf, *Ideologies,* p. 8.

24. See Kirkpatrick, 'Institutes of Ghazan Khan' and Gladwin, *History of Jehangir et al.* on this point.

25. Nicholas B. Dirks, *The Scandal of Empire: India and the Creation of Imperial Britain,* Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of the Harvard University Press, 2006, contains some discussion of late eighteenth century colonialist histories, but does not recognize their 'dialogue' with Persian historiography. Exceptions to this tendency are J.S. Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India: Assessments of British Historians,* Calcutta, 1970; Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth Century Britain: The British in Bengal,* Cambridge, 2007.

26. James Mill, *History of British India with Notes by H.H. Wilson and Introduction by J.K. Galbraith,* vols 1 and 2, rpt, New York, 1968; H.M. Elliot and J. Dowson, *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians,* vol. 1, New York, 1966, pp. xv–xxvii.

27. Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement,* New Delhi, 1982 (rpt); Robert Travers, *Ideology and Empire in Eighteenth Century India,* 2007, Cambridge.

28. Dow, *A History of Hindostan,* vol. 1, p. xii.

29. Gladwin, *The History of Hindostan*; Kirkpatrick, 'The Institutes of Ghazan Khan'.

30. Ibid.

31. Gladwin, *The History of Hindostan,* pp. i–iii.

32. Ibid., p. ii.

33. Ibid., p. iii.

34. Dow, *A History of Hindostan,* vol. 1, p. xii.

35. Ibid., pp. xii, xiv, xv.

36. Kirkpatrick, 'The Institutes of Ghazan Khan', pp. 149–51.

37. Gladwin, *The History of Hindostan*, p. v.

38. Scrafton, *Reflections,* p. 24.

39. Kirkpatrick, 'The Institutes of Ghazan Khan', p. 167.

40. Dow, *A History of Hindostan,* vol. 1, p. viii.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid.

43. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 369.

44. Kirkpatrick, 'The Institutes of Ghazan Khan', p. 151.

45. Ibid.

46. Ibid., p. 166.

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid., pp. 170–1.

49. Ibid., pp. 175, 180, 184.

50. Ibid., p. 170.

51. Dow, *A History of Hindostan,* vol. 1, pp. xi–xii.

52. For Orme's view, see *Indostan,* vol. 1, p. 28.

53. Dow, *A History of Hindostan,* vol. 3, p. xlv.

54. Bolts, *A Consideration,* pp. 33, 36, 48.

55. Dow, *A History of Hindostan*, vol. 3, p. xlvii.

56. Ibid., p. xlii.

57. Dow, *A History of Hindostan*; Gladwin, *The History of Hindostan*; Kirkpatrick, 'The Institutes of Ghazan Khan'.

58. Kirkpatrick, 'The Institutes of Ghazan Khan', p. 151.

59. The political reasons for Bolts's polemical attack on the English East India Company have been discussed above. Dow's strongest criticism of the Company is contained in vol. 3 of his *A History of Hindostan.* By the time Dow was writing vol. 3 of this work, he had joined forces with disgruntled English officers of the Company's army who revolted

against Clive's efforts to implement '*batta* reform'—see Tuck, *The East India Company*, vol. 3, p. xiii.

60. Orme, *Indostan*, vol. 2, p. 154.

61. Bolts, *A Consideration*, pp. 64, 195, also see 'Preface'.

62. Orme attempted something of the kind in his *Historical Fragments of the Mughal Empire.*

63. Dow, *A History of Hindostan*, vol. 2, p. 427.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., p. 429.

66. Bolts, *A Consideration*, p. vii.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid., p. 210.

69. Ibid., p. 209.

70. Ibid., pp. 210–11.

71. Ibid., p. 211.

72. Ibid., p. 109.

73. This point was raised earlier in Chapter 4. For some references relating to the large literature on this subject, see endnote 19, Chapter 4.

74. P.J. Marshall (ed.), *The British Discovery of Hinduism in the Eighteenth Century*, Cambridge, 1970, p. 142.

75. Ibid., p. 108.

76. Dow, *A History of Hindostan*, vol. 1, pp. v–viii and 'Advertizement'.

77. Marshall, *The British Discovery*, p. 143.

78. Ibid.

79. Ibid., p. 46.

80. Ibid., p. 117.

81. Ibid., p. 142.

82. Ibid., p. 48

83. Ibid., p. 107.

84. Ibid., p. 20.

85. Ibid., p. 48.

86. Ibid., pp. 114, 126.

87. Ibid., pp. 262–3, pp. 157–8.

88. Ibid., pp. 158–9.

89. Mill, *The History of British India*, p. 112.

90. Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India*, p. 49.

91. Tammita-Delgoda, 'Nabob, Historian and Orientalist', pp. 223–6.

92. Tammita-Delgoda, 'Nabob, Historian and Orientalist'.

93. Ibid., p. 192.

94. Francis Gladwin, *The History of Hindostan During the Reigns of Jehangir, Shahjehan and Aurangzebe*, vol. 1, 1788, Calcutta.

95. Dow, *A History of Hindostan,* vol. 1, pp. ii–iii.

96. Ibid., vol. 1, p. vi.

97. Ibid., vol. 1, p. ii.

98. Ibid., vol. 1, p. vi.

99. Ibid., vol. 1, p. ii.

100. According to Dow, 'all the oriental historians write in what they call in Europe, "poetical prose."' Dow, *History of Hindostan,* vol. 1, p. vii.

101. Tammita-Delgoda, 'Nabob, Historian and Orientalist', p. 223.

102. Dow, *A History of Hindostan*, vol. 1, p ii.

103. Ibid., vol. 1, p. vii.

104. Ibid., vol. 1, p. viii.

105. Marshall, *The British Discovery*, p. 127, Orme, *Indostan,* vol. 1, p. 3.

106. Dow, *A History of Hindostan*, vol. 1, p. iii.

107. Ibid., vol. 1, pp. iii–iv.

108. Ibid., vol. 1, p. iv.

109. Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India,* pp. 65–9.

110. Mill, *The History of British India,* vol. 3, pp. 165–367; Grewal, *Muslim Rule in India,* pp. 130–64.

111. Elliot and Dowson, *The History of India as Told by its Own Historians,* vol. 1, pp. xv–xxvii.

112. Charles Stewart, *History of Bengal from the First Mohammedan Invasion until the Virtual Conquest of the Country by the English AD 1757,* Delhi, 1971 (rpt); 'List of Persian Works Used in the Compilation of this Work'.

7

Mughal Culture and Persianization in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Bengal

A recurrent theme in the previous chapters of the book has been the influence of a Persianized culture on the production of historiographic narratives in Bengal during the early modern period. This chapter discusses Mughal political culture in general and its prevalence in Bengal in particular. It creates a broader context for the prevalence of a Persianized culture in Mughal (and pre-Mughal) India by describing its status and currency in the Eastern part of the Islamic world. Secondly, it describes the elements that composed Mughal political culture in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Finally, the chapter explores the general prevalence of Mughal political culture in Bengal together with its limitations in order to provide a context for the understanding and appreciation of the long shadow cast by the Indo-Persian tradition of tarikh writing on a range of narratives composed in early modern Bengal.

The World of Islam and Persian

The world of Islam, in the post-thirteenth century in particular, was a transcontinental, global civilization that stretched territorially from Spain to China and shared many attributes such as a common religious culture, artistic and architectural styles, and a public sphere imbued with many similar features.[1] This is not to suggest, however, that in this *dar-al-Islam,* regional and local interpretations of Islam and its associated culture of religion, politics, and art, had been sublimated in

favour of a homogeneous civilizational system. This chapter, in fact, discusses a very local adaptation of a variety of Islamicate culture—that is, Mughal courtly or political culture during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The point about the existence of an Islamic world is intended to draw attention to the fact that in tandem with a rich variety of local and regional 'translations'[2] of Islam and its culture, there existed certain overarching commonalities which in no way weakened or cancelled out the former. On the contrary, as a significant body of scholarship has shown, the local and global aspects of the Islamicate world nurtured and complemented one another.[3] It is undoubted that the spread of Islam was primarily instrumental in the wider radiation of Arabic, both as a spoken language and as a written one.[4] In the Eastern part of the Islamic world (from Iran eastwards into Afghanistan, India, and beyond, and northwards into central Asia), Arabic, in Hourani's words, 'came up against a frontier in Iran where the use of the Persian language was continued'[5] From about the tenth century CE onwards, Persian underwent a period of 'Arabization' or Islamization, that is, it was not very different in grammatical structure from Pahlavi, but was written in Arabic script with a vocabulary enriched by words taken from Arabic. This 'new Persian' or Arabized Persian became the vehicle of a high literary culture which prevailed in Iran certainly, but also in Central Asia, Afghanistan, South Asia, and beyond for almost an entire millennium. E.G. Browne describes it as a 'Persian renaissance'.[6] As Ehsan Yarshater points out, this literary culture in addition formed part of a broader range of political and cultural practices, ideas and traditions comprising 'religious thought, political theory and practice, administrative models..., the sciences, and morals and manners'[7] A Persianized culture became an important element in Islamicate culture and especially courtly culture in these areas of the Islamic world. Islamic dynasties such as the Ghaznavids, Ghurids, Seljuqs, and others were well known for their patronage of Persian as were ruling families which had descended from Timur. In varying degrees, the four Turkish-speaking Muslim rulers who founded major states across Asia in the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (the founders of the Ottoman, Safavid, Uzbeg, and Mughal empires) shared this overarching cultural orientation, that is, a Turko-Mongol cultural heritage paired with an Islamic-Persian culture. Babur was a descendant of both Chengiz Khan and Timur and he perfectly exemplified this melange of cultural elements.[8]

In these Persianized zones too, Arabic held its own as the language of the Koran, and religious/theological and legal literature, whether produced in Iran or northern India, was written in Arabic. Persian was primarily reserved for the production of what has been termed 'secular' literature, creating what Hourani terms a 'double culture'.[9] This double culture refers to the broad, trans-regional linguistic and cultural traditions associated with Arabic and Persian that characterized a large segment of the Islamic world for a millennium. This double-culture in turn coexisted and interacted in creative and complex ways with myriads of regional languages and cultural traditions that existed throughout *dar-al-Islam*.

The currency of a Persianized culture among the ruling classes and aristocracy of the eastern Islamic lands extended into the South Asian subcontinent—both its northern and southern parts. The use of Persian in the Delhi Sultanate and in various Islamic polities in pre-Mughal India (including Bengal) has already been noted in Chapter 1.

Sanjay Subrahmanyam has shown that the diffusion of a Persianate culture in regions along the Indian Ocean littoral was aided in part through maritime trade and contacts. He tracks this phenomenon through a series of kingdoms bordering the Bay of Bengal during the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries such as the sultanates of Golconda and Bengal, Roshang in the Arakan region, and Melaka on the Straits of Malacca. Persianization in these regions was comprised of the use of the Persian language for diplomatic correspondence, the existence of a Persianized literary taste among the elites, and in 'comportments and conceptions of statecraft'.[10] In contrast to landlocked regions such as Central Asia and Afghanistan, the Persianate culture visible around the Bay of Bengal was seen in the participation in the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean maritime trade by powerful court officials and merchants of Persian origin.[11] Phillip Wagoner's much cited article has established that elements of Islamicate—if not clearly Persian—culture were assimilated and emulated by court circles in the Vijayanagara kingdom in southern India during the late medieval period.[12] In all these places adherence to Persianization was perceived to be an aspect of Islamic culture; its Iranian associations were no less significant. Iran was associated with ancient, royal traditions, and the Iranian mode of titulature for bureaucratic personnel as well as concepts of sovereignty drawing upon ancient, pre-Islamic Iranian notions of the same, came to be embraced by royalty in many polities within this

world. Iran's association with Shii Islam as well as the fact that Iran was the originating place for many Sufi sects, created further connections between Iran and a variety of Islamic and Islamicate polities ranging from landlocked Central Asian kingdoms to entrepot, maritime city-states such as Melaka.

Sheldon Pollock has hypothesized the existence of what he calls a 'Sanskrit cosmopolis' which was alive for practically an entire millennium preceding the one in which Persianization created its trans-regional web across vast expanses of territories. The Sanskrit cosmopolis, extending from the South Asian subcontinent through parts of Central Asia and Southeast Asia, created a Sanskrit-based literary style and an aesthetic culture which was subscribed to by kings and elites throughout this world.[13] This cosmopolis was, however, not associated with a project of conquest and military-political domination. But the Persian cultural sphere was, for the most part, created through the linked projects of conquest and empire building. In this respect it shares a very general similarity with the Hellenistic, the Roman/Latin, and the Chinese cultural spheres.[14] The prevalence of a Persianized political culture within the South Asian subcontinent was thus part of a broader Persianate cosmopolis.

Persian in the Mughal Empire and Mughal Bengal

Despite the considerable cultivation of Persian in pre-Mughal India, it was undoubtedly the Mughal imperial state which presided over the 'most productive—perhaps even incomparable—efflorescence of Persian literary culture' in India.[15] The centrality of Persian for Mughal political culture was established firmly by Akbar and his successors until at least the earlier years of the eighteenth century. Mughal patronage of Persian was manifest among other things in the generous support offered to poets and writers who wrote in that language, and in the translation of works representing Hindu religious and cultural traditions in Persian. More importantly, as Muzaffar Alam's insightful work demonstrates, Persian was pressed into the service of the ideological and cultural agenda of the empire. The Mughals, for the most part, sought to build and sustain an imperial polity which was non-sectarian and one in which people affiliated with different religious and cultural communities could coexist peacefully. Though it had its limitations, Persian held the potential to function as the most effective and accomplished vehicle of communication in such

circumstances. Sanskrit, the classical, sacred, and prestige-language of the Indian subcontinent, might not have been deemed suitable as a language of governance for a Muslim dynasty; the various regional Indian vernaculars which had evolved from Prakrit were alternately perceived as being too ordinary to serve as a medium of imperial communication. Alam suggests that Persian poetry, which had integrated many themes and ideas from pre-Islamic Persia and had been an important vehicle of liberalism in the medieval Muslim world, helped in no insignificant way in creating and supporting the Mughal attempt to sustain a broadly tolerant regime accommodative of diverse religious traditions. 'Persian', Alam explains, 'thus facilitated the Mughal cultural conquest of India'.[16]

Two facets of Persian literary culture are particularly relevant for this work—its entrenchment as the language of government and also its association with elite, courtly society. The institutionalization of Persian as the official language of governance and administration, from the time of Akbar, played a critically important role in widening the currency of the language well beyond a circle of Muslim nobility and gave it a professional and utilitarian appeal for many Hindu literate, gentry communities with traditions of bureaucratic service under various governments. This feature actually pre-dated Mughal rule since Sikandar Lodi is believed to have introduced the use of Persian as the state language in the early sixteenth century. This development inaugurated the trend among many Hindu scribal/professional communities to take up the study of Persian on account of career-related opportunities associated with it. However, Akbar's decision in the same direction produced more widespread results since the territorial extent and administrative penetration of Mughal rule was much greater and deeper in comparison to that of the Lodi sultans. Thus, the institutionalization of Persian as the state language under the Mughals led to the emergence of a Persian literary sphere which was not restricted to immigrant, elite Muslim lineages only. The viability of Persian as a language of governance was such that the English East India Company, upon taking over sovereign political power over parts of India in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, used it too in much the same way until its decision in 1835 to replace it with English. Yet another very important factor which had helped non-Muslim communities and lineages to take up the study of Persian was the reform of the school curriculum by Akbar. The introduction of non-religious themes into the syllabi of middle-level madrasa schools made

the pursuit of Persian studies more culturally acceptable to Hindus in Mughal India. Initially, the teachers in charge of these madrasas were Iranian. But in time, Indians, including Hindus who were proficient in Persian, also became teachers at such institutions. Thus, the greater accessibility of a kind of non-religious Persian education in madrasas and opportunities of official employment for those who had Persian proficiency, served to ensure the association of certain literate Hindu communities with traditions of government service to the Mughal regime, particularly since the seventeenth century. Often, a particular office became hereditary in a certain family for generations. This ensured, among other things, the continuation of the study of Persian among such lineages for several generations. Some of these munshis, such as Anand Ram Mukhlis and Brindabandas Khushgo for instance, became famous for their elegant Persian compositions and their writing samples were treated as models by other munshis. Studies of the bureaucratic and administrative cultures of other contemporaneous Asian empires such as the Ottoman and the Ching have contributed greatly to our understanding of the workings of these imperial systems. A lacuna which had existed in this regard for Mughal India has been filled thanks to the work of Alam and Subrahmanyam, particularly in their vivid description of munshi Nik Rai and his cultural, professional, and technical accomplishments during the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.[17] Rao-Shulman-Subrahmanyam have highlighted similar elements for the south Indian *karanam* during the early modern period.[18] Perpetuating the potency of Persianization was the large influx of Iranians into Mughal India and the disproportionately big role played by Iranian émigrés in the Mughal nobility.[19]

Much of the existing scholarly discussion about Indo-Persian culture in Mughal India places special emphasis on and privileges a Persian literary culture. This is indeed appropriate. However, Indo-Persian literary culture was a part of a larger constellation of cultural practices, also imbued with Persianate elements. Such practices spanned a vast spectrum ranging from painting and architectural styles, the 'arts' of the book, modes of book illustration, norms of attire, and even gastronomic tastes to name only a few.[20] It would thus be somewhat inaccurate to refer to an Indo-Persian literary tradition in isolation from these. The power of this literary tradition may well have been reinforced and further buttressed by many other practices, also inflected with Persianate elements, which collectively constituted Indo-Persian culture in Mughal India.

Mughal Political/Courtly Culture and Persianization

Persianized culture in Mughal India was primarily a part of the political culture associated with the state and the ruling classes who embodied and/or served it. When pared down to its most fundamental essence, courtly culture is seen also to be linked to the moral foundations of governance. A large body of literature on the subject of courtly culture and manners in medieval and early modern Europe underscores its importance in the formulation of notions about ethical conduct, self-discipline, and the very attributes of what was considered civilizational.[21] Daud Ali's study on courtly society in early medieval India affirms that a court culture ultimately sought to produce a moral and ethical subject.[22] Governance was not regarded just as administrative and bureaucratic competence, but essentially an exercise in ethical judgement and action. Thus, in Islamic and Islamicate contexts, discourses on principles of governance and sovereignty were most often found in ethical literature (*akhlaq*, *adab* and other kinds of 'advice literature').[23] Therefore, theoretically at least, it was very important that persons imbued with the right kind of ethical values were recruited into the project of governing the empire. These values were believed to be manifest in a certain moral superiority, nobility, and refinement of mental proclivities as also in physical behaviour. The material, worldly, cultural expressions of such nobility and moral superiority were perceived to be manifest in norms of social deportment, cultural (literary and musical) tastes, and personal accomplishments of such people. Thus ethical awareness and the associated package of cultural accoutrements (manners, protocol, taste, and the like) were manifest, in the case of the Mughal ruling class, its aristocracy and higher officials, in a Persianate idiom. In the Mughal context, this Persianized culture also functioned as a cosmopolitan, elite culture to which non-Muslim Mughal aristocrats subscribed.

In the Mughal milieu, the sophistication and refinement necessary for a 'noble status' were associated with a range of personal qualities and accomplishments. As seen earlier, by the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries top priority was assigned to a tradition of utmost loyalty to the emperor and dedicated service to the empire.[24] This culture, which suffused the higher mansabdari cadre in particular, represented what Barbara Metcalf identifies as the cosmopolitan facet of the Islamic ideal of adab.[25] The people who held higher ranks in the Mughal service

and constituted the aristocracy were also expected to possess qualities such as courage, manliness, and martial prowess.[26] The refinement necessary for a courtier or nobleman was strongly linked to norms of personal etiquette and conduct expected at court as well as matters of attire, diet, literary, musical, and gastronomic tastes.[27] Mughal courtiers were expected to be connoisseurs of Persian literature—better still, to be poets and writers themselves. They were also expected to be patrons and connoisseurs of music. In other words, Mughal political culture, especially in its courtly aspect, was believed to be a vehicle of civilité. It served as an integrative phenomenon for those who subscribed to all or at least to its most important constitutive elements.[28] Those outside the boundaries of this realm of civilité as constructed by the Indo-Persian milieu of the Mughals were clearly identifiable and were looked down upon.[29]

Yet, despite the awareness that Mughal political culture and its courtly complement marked out boundaries between the 'high' nobles of the court and the less refined and unrefined 'low' people who stood outside it, the boundaries of this cultural formation were far more permeable and porous than court treatises on manners and deportment would lead us to believe. Indeed, 'over the long durée, the ways of the court', writes Daud Ali, 'formed an acculturative mechanism through which aspiring men and local elites entered into the pale of 'good society'.[30] As the following discussion on the currency of a Persianized culture in Mughal Bengal shows, the possibilities of joining a group of powerful men who commanded material resources and prestige through their service to the empire motivated segments of provincial aristocracy and gentry in Bengal to consciously cultivate aspects of the formers' lifestyle and public culture.

Finally, Mughal political and courtly culture should not be regarded as a stable, unchanging formation that endured unaltered for many centuries. Instead, it came to embody different features and traits during different phases of the Mughal imperium. More importantly, despite the presence of some predominant and characteristic elements, the perception of Mughal courtly culture and its constituent elements was often different in different regions and sub-regions of the empire at different points of time.[31] Alam and Subrahmanyam as well as Daud Ali have quite correctly pointed out that there is a need to study how imperial, courtly cultures were appropriated and 'translated' by different groups of people in different parts of the subcontinent.[32] This book showcases the 'cultural translation' of a Persianized Mughal political

culture in the literary culture and historiographical traditions of early modern Bengal.

Persian in Mughal Bengal

South Asia's 'central Perso-Islamic axis'[33] is regarded as stretching from Lahore through Delhi to the Deccan; in regions beyond this axis, Persianate elements were supposed to be less pronounced.[34] While Persianized culture was probably more deeply entrenched and stronger in core areas of northern India and in parts of the Deccan, the discussion below demonstrates that it had made considerable inroads into certain segments of Bengali society during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in particular, lingering on into the nineteenth century as well.

Bengal's attachment to the empire meant the presence of a larger number of people of Iranian background in this region. Most of them were bureaucrats and officials appointed by the imperial government in Delhi to this newly acquired suba. The Afghan traveller Muhammad Balkhi reported that during his trip to Rajmahal in western Bengal, he had met people whose family origins lay in Balkh, Bukhara, Khurasan, Baghdad, and north India.[35] Muhammad Sadiq Isfahani had moved in the bureaucratic circles of the Mughal empire since his youth. In the reign of Shah Jehan, he was assigned a jagir in Bengal and lived in Dhaka from 1629 until his death in 1650. In his work, entitled the *Subh Sadiq*[36], Muhammad Sadiq presented a fascinating picture of the presence of a large number of people with Iranian antecedents in Bengal and Bihar during the seventeenth century. These people were associated with Mughal administration both directly and indirectly and were carriers of a Persianized culture in eastern India. In addition, large numbers of people of northern Indian origin appeared in Bengal in the train of Mughal armies and officials in order to fill clerical and scribal offices, to serve as bankers, financiers, and suppliers of food and provisions, to the incoming Mughal regime. Some among the northern Indian scribes and entrepreneurs accompanying the Mughal regime into Bengal were successful in securing superior revenue rights and thus started the process of becoming integrated into Bengal's landed aristocracy.[37]

On account of the demands of their profession, many of these people were literate in Persian; they also often used some form or another of Hindavi, the lingua franca of north India. Bengali literary sources for

the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries often refer to these versions of Hindavi as 'Nagri'. To reiterate the point noted in Chapter 1, in Bengal both Persian and varieties of Hindavi (such as Awadhi for instance) were at times bracketed together as linguistic/literary and cultural influences which emanated from northern India and, during this period, were associated with Islamic/Mughal political power.[38]

Significant numbers of Hindu Bengali gentry and aristocracy also attached themselves to the emergent Mughal provincial regime in Bengal. Just as the sultans of Bengal had recruited and relied on capable, literate, administratively skilled local people to staff practically all levels of their administration, so also the newly established Mughal provincial government in Bengal relied on people of similar backgrounds and skills. Many of the previous chapters contain references to this phenomenon. The main purpose here is to refer to the broader implications of such service for the cultural milieu of the region's gentry and aristocracy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The steady rise of Raja Pratapaditya's forefathers up the rungs of the administration of the Kararni sultans of Bengal and then under Mughal rule have been described in Chapter 4. This, in fact, illustrates a fairly typical professional trajectory for many gentry lineages in Bengal which were endowed with the requisite skills of revenue-management, account-keeping, scribal/clerical work, and proficiency in Persian, and other skills. The career path followed by Raja Rajballabh, who rose to become one of the most important public figures of nawabi Bengal, as well as his entire lineage, is also illustrative of this trend.[39] Upward mobility on the career track was tied largely to proficiency in Persian. 'Persian reigned supreme [in Bengal]', observed Enamul Huq, 'not only in the court but almost in every walk of life'.[40] Indeed, Persian stood out as the language of public affairs, for the maintenance of revenue accounts, and in courtly circles. It was also used on coins and inscriptions. There are hardly any Arabic inscriptions dating from Mughal Bengal.[41] There was therefore an expansion in the currency and use of Persian as a language of state in Bengal under Mughal rule as compared to Sultanate Bengal. Without exception, the association of Bengali Hindus with Mughal and then nawabi administration was associated with Persian proficiency. Rajballabh himself was supposed to be well-versed in Bengali, Persian, and Sanskrit, and may even have known a little English.[42] The examples of such lineages and their professional careers is reminiscent of the skills and literary proficiency of the north Indian munshis and south Indian karanams during this period.[43] Persian proficiency was in fact

the necessary first step for a person with ambitions in administrative service at all levels. The nawabi administration in Murshidabad and its subordinate administrative headquarters at Dhaka, Patna, and Cuttack required employees who could create, maintain, and oversee records of various government departments that were in Persian; correspondence between and among various levels of the government was also in Persian. Zamindars also had to maintain their revenue and administrative accounts in Persian and this opened up another level of scribal/clerical jobs for people possessing Persian literacy.

The acquisition of Persian was tied to a formal education. Madrasas provided training in Persian, and Hindu zamindars often took the initiative to set up schools in their own estates where boys of gentry families could be sent to master it. Persian was perceived to be an indispensable educational attainment for both gentry and aristocrats.

Ramram Basu's recounting of the family history of Raja Pratapaditya, for instance, makes this very clear. For at least two or more generations prior to Pratapaditya, the male members of his family had carefully cultivated an education which emphasized a high degree of proficiency in Persian combined with expertise in Bengali and Nagri.[44] Persian literacy also provided an avenue for ambitious gentry families to establish personal and social connections with aristocrats and even royalty. Srihari and Janakiballabh (father and uncle of Pratapaditya respectively) attended the same Persian school as Bayazid and Daud, the sons of Sultan Sulaiman Karrani, ruler of Bengal. The childhood bond between Daud Karrani and the brothers Srihari and Janakiballabh enabled the latter to make substantial material and professional gains during the former's reign.[45] Once Srihari and his brother acceded to a zamindari in Jessore, they made sure that the heir apparent to the estate was also schooled in the same type of education. '[Pratapaditya] was proficient in all kinds of knowledge [and was] a veritable scholar in the academic disciplines' wrote Ramram Basu, '[and] was very well-trained in Arabic, Persian, Nagri, Bengali, Sanskrit, and other types of knowledge'.[46]

Persian literacy had spread so far among Hindu gentry families that often individuals from such lineages served as teachers of Persian. A branch of Rajballabh's family which lived in the village of Japsa in Bikrampur pargana consisted of noted scholars of Persian. They maintained a school where Persian was taught.[47] The poet Bharatchandra Roy trained in Persian with a certain Ramchandra Munshi who lived in the village of Debanandapur, not far from the French settlement at Chandernagore. The examples so far have been

from eminent zamindar families. There are also plenty of examples of Persian literacy among much humbler gentry families of more modest means as well as rural families.[48]

High-status Bengali Hindu families with past (or present) traditions of government service and careers in law continued to devote themselves to the cultivation of Persian well into the mid to later years of the nineteenth century. Bengali biographical and autobiographical literature from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries contains plenty of allusions to this. As Abdul Karim pointed out, it was the tradition in Mughal and nawabi Bengal for Persian literate families—Hindus as well as Muslims—to be given the honorific title of 'munshi'.[49] The largest number of Bengali Hindus who associated themselves with Mughal administration was from the Bengali Baidya and Kayastha jatis. Ramram Basu described Persian literacy as the 'jati *vyavasa*' (hereditary enterprise of the jati) of Kayasthas during this period.[50] Indeed, the association of Kayasthas and Baidyas with scribal/clerical work also finds resonance in Bengali literature from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[51] But there were other upper-caste Hindu jatis in Bengal—Brahmins included—who also participated in this kind of bureaucratic culture based on Persian literacy. The family of Maharaja Nandakumar supplies us with such an example, as do the Brahmin rajas of Nadia and many others.[52]

The systematic acquisition of Persian literacy comprised perhaps the single most important aspect of a Persianized culture in Mughal Bengal. The *Subh-i-Sadiq* of Mirza Muhammad Sadiq provides materials for a reconstruction of this environment. It illustrates, above all, the great importance assigned to literary ability and connoisseurship among Mughal officials. Mirza Muhammad Sadiq's reminiscences are replete, above all, with references to many Persian poets, calligraphists, and musicians who were found in the ranks of Mughal bureaucracy in different parts of the empire and who served in the entourages of various eminent nobles and Mughal princes. What is also striking in this account is the constant circulation of distinguished poets, scholars, and writers between Iran and Mughal India, as well as among different regions within India. For example, during the subahdari of Qasim Khan in Bengal (1613–17), Sayyid Mir, Mukhlis Hussain Tabrizi, and Hasan Beg Grami (all mid-level government officials), to name only a few, were known to be Persian poets and writers. Mirza Muhammad Sadiq's upbringing included studying literature and calligraphy with several talented Mughal officials whom he met during his youth.[53] Such skills

no doubt endowed him with the cultural sophistication necessary to hold even mid-level office in the Mughal bureaucracy. As Shantanu Phukan points out, it is difficult for a modern English speaker to realize the 'extent to which poetry was a spoken reality in the social relations of Mughal Persianate culture...in the Persianized circles of Mughal India poetry circulated like currency'.[54]

The courts of the Mughal subahdar and other high officials in the Bengal suba became important sites for the display of Persian literary connoisseurship. The Persianized Hindu elites of Mughal Bengal also participated in the literary culture prevailing in these courts. As early as the 1550s, the Vaishnava writer Jayananda recorded with outrage in his Bengali poetic work entitled the *Chaitanya Mangal* that Bengali Brahmins not only knew Persian, but were reading *masnavis*.[55] Mirza Muhammad Sadiq in the seventeenth century referred to a certain Mathura Das as 'an intelligent poet of Persian in Jehangirnagar [Dhaka]'.[56] Mathura Das's poetic ability may even have helped him to secure his release from prison.[57]

Persian was perceived as an important component of Mughal courtly culture and something that was regarded—in Bengal at least—as emanating from northern India. Some varieties of Hindavi—such as Brajbhasha or Brajabuli—were also associated with a northern Indian culture and also partly with Mughal culture. The association of this language with the Braj region, gave this literary register a trans-regional currency within the Indian subcontinent as the language of Krishna-centred devotionalism. As Allison Busch shows, it also functioned as a courtly vernacular that is, a literary language which was accorded patronage and appreciation by Mughal courtly circles as well as by courtly communities in northern India, the Deccan, and elsewhere.[58] Brajbhasha or Brajabuli had a long association with eastern India and with Bengal as the language of Vaishnava devotional literature. Although hardly ever acknowledged by modern scholarship, it also functioned as a literary medium which was associated with elite culture practised by aristocrats in Bengal. According to Ramram Basu's biography, Pratapaditya had been dispatched to Delhi by his family when he was a young prince. By placing Pratapaditya at the Mughal imperial darbar, Basu's narrative sought to establish that the former was no rustic, unsophisticated chieftain's son from the marshy, forested region of Jessore. He was instead adept at sophisticated courtly culture and knew well how to conduct himself there. Pratapaditya's resistance thus was not so much to the elite culture of the Mughal empire but

rather to the obligation of having to pay tribute to the Mughals and accepting their overlordship in political and administrative matters. In Ramram Basu's account, Pratapaditya impressed the Mughal emperor by his quick wit and ability to compose Braj verses extemporaneously.[59] This confirms Phukan's comment (cited above) about literary ability and connoisseurship being important cultural assets in Mughal official/courtly circles. In Pratapaditya's case, his ability at poetic repartee enabled him to get noticed by the Mughal emperor and the former used this acquaintance to good effect by securing an imperial order to seize the family's estates in Jessore by ousting both his father and uncle.[60] There are also other examples of Bengali aristocrats—including the poet Bharatchandra Roy—composing poetry in Brajbhasha.[61]

Literary historians as a group have tended to acknowledge the currency of Persian in Mughal and nawabi Bengal; most of them however characterize it as utilitarian. In other words, the gentry and aristocracy needed to learn Persian because it was useful as a tool of career advancement and because one's revenue accounts, petitions to government, and such others were needed to be in Persian.[62] The overall consensus among literary historians of Bengali is that Persian (and also Arabic, Turkish, Hindustani, and others) produced only a philological effect on the Bengali language and was manifest in the accretion of Persian, Hindustani, and Turkish words in it.[63] Following the thesis of Suniti Kumar Chatterjee, the growing presence of Persian words in Bengali has been noted in Chapter 4. The utilitarian and practical benefits of being literate in Persian are beyond doubt. My hypothesis differs from that of existing scholarship, first in terms of emphasizing the extent to which Persian had a currency in Bengal for several centuries. Secondly, I argue that in addition to its utilitarian and practical value, Persian literacy, together with a broader Persianized culture associated with it, had come to be regarded as a vehicle of refinement and sophistication essential for all those who sought to move in high political circles. The genealogy of the rajas of Nadia, the *Kshitishvamsavalicharitam*, gives us an idea of this. It refers to Persian literacy as the necessary prerequisite for the office of qanungo ('*yavanikabhasha prasiddha qangoi karmani*'); it also alludes to Persian as 'shastra' ('*parasika shastram*'), a branch of learning imbued with substantive intellectual properties rather than a mere practical medium. The same genealogy also characterizes the mastery of Persian language and a Persian-style education to be one of the essential attributes of a Hindu raja ('*parasikadi-shastram-adhite-dayalu-nripa-lakshana-shilo*').[64]

Also, the Persianate attainments of Bengali gentry and aristocracy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and beyond were remembered with pride by their families and circles of educated gentry-subjects and kinsmen who surrounded them. Oral traditions preserved by the descendants of Maharaja Nandakumar remembered the Raja's great prowess at Persian calligraphy and letter-writing (*insha*); oral and some textual traditions preserved by descendants of Maharaja Pratapaditya and Raja Rajballabh also placed emphasis on their Persian proficiency.[65] Maharshi Debendranath, the father of Rabindranath Tagore, enjoyed reading the Persian poets Hafiz and Rumi, just as other educated gentlemen of the earlier part of the nineteenth century still did.[66]

The prevalence of a Persianized culture among the political elites and bureaucracy of Bengal was manifested also in a Persianized intellectual culture in which narratives about various rajas and local chieftains came to be composed in Persian and libraries maintained by the Bengal aristocracy in their mansions and palaces were richly stocked with books in various languages, including Persian. A survey of books in the library of the nawabs of Murshidabad dating to the early years of the twentieth century reveals a collection of what the author of this survey described as 'a large and varied collection of books and most rare and valuable oriental manuscripts'.[67] This survey was undertaken at a time when the fortunes of the Murshidabad nawabs had been in free fall for almost a century and a half; moreover, the town of Murshidabad had experienced serious military-political turmoil on several occasions, particularly during the mid-eighteenth century. Neither of these conditions was conducive to the safety and security of valuable manuscript collections. Nevertheless, this survey allows us a glimpse into the types of books purchased and preserved at such libraries. According to Purnachandra Mazumdar, this library had a remarkable collection of Qurans. The books listed by Mazumdar as 'secular literature' (almost all in Persian) included a *Timurnama* which had been written in 1000 Hijri and a copy of the *Khamsa* of Nizami which appears to have been purchased by Murshid Quli Khan in the Deccan and then brought by him to Bengal when he assumed office there. This library also contained two volumes of the *Akbarnama* of Abul Fazl in his own handwriting as well as a copy of a Persian translation by Abul Fazl of the Sanskrit play *Nala-Damayanti*.[68] Lists of Arabic and Persian manuscripts acquired by the Asiatic Society of Bengal at the turn of the twentieth century also catalogue large numbers of Persian manuscripts which were described by the compilers of this list as 'histories'.[69] Unfortunately, these lists do not mention specific libraries

from which these materials were acquired or the identities of the most recent owners of these books. Nevertheless, they convey an idea of the reading tastes and overall cultural/literary tastes of the Hindu as well as Muslim literati of pre-colonial Mughal Bengal. The Asiatic Society catalogues in question include works such as the *Tarikh-i-Firuz Shahi* of Ziyauddin Barani, the *Tarikh-i-Alfi*, the *Tarikh-i-Farrukh Siyar* by Muhammad Ahsan 'Ijad', and relatively recent works such as the *Khulasat-i-Halat-i-Maratha-wa-Jang-i-Ahmad Shah Durrani* written by Nawab Ali Ibrahim Khan during the 1790s. The acquisitions drive undertaken by the Asiatic Society of Bengal also secured copies of a Persian translation by Shaikh Fyzi of the play Nal-Damayanti, a manuscript entitled the *Tarjumah-i-Mahabharata*, a Persian translation of the great Indian epic by Abul Fazl, Persian translations of the Sanskrit *Bhagavata Purana*, and Sanskrit *Vishnu Purana* among other manuscripts. A manuscript copy of the *Pandnama* of Shaikh Saadi Shirazi was found to be 'interlined' with concurrent translations into both Sanskrit and Hindi, and a *Bhagavad Gita* had been copied in Persian characters while retaining its Sanskrit text.[70] Libraries of Hindu aristocrats of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were also stocked with Persian books. The library of Maharaja Nabakrishna of Shobhabazar was, for example, stocked with a large and valuable collection of Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian books.[71]

Bengali zamindars also commissioned, or at any rate encouraged, the composition of Persian narratives about themselves and their families. These narratives, primarily biographies in all likelihood, charted the rise of these aristocrats up the career ladder via bureaucratic service. Among such narratives were an account of the Afghan zamindars of Birbhum by a certain Fyzullah munshi and a biography in Persian of Raja Rajballabh by Chandra Kumar Roy.[72]

Persianization and Islamization

The genealogy of Persianized culture connected it to political authority and to the political culture practised and cultivated by this authority. The picture in Bengal conforms to this model. As noted above, Persianization was indeed perceived to be an aspect of Islam, though it represented the political culture of Islamic civilization, sometimes described even as the 'secular' aspects of Islamic civilization. This however leads to the question about whether Persianization in Mughal Bengal was different from the not insignificant Persianization that had already taken root in the region during the period of the Bengal

sultanate. Indeed, there does appear to be somewhat of a qualitative distinction between the two. Persianization in Mughal Bengal spread among a much larger segment of the region's literate gentry and landed aristocracy in comparison to that in Sultanate Bengal. More importantly, Persianate culture in Mughal Bengal was much more strongly regarded as an important component of Mughal imperial culture. A greater awareness of the imperial system fashioned by the Mughals and of Bengal's place in it underlined this perception. The instances of Persianization in Bengali narratives—performative poetry, prose narratives, and also English language narratives penned by a generation of Persian-literate East India Company officials in Bengal—all indicate that elements from the corpus of Indo-Persian literature (including tarikh literature) were integrated and accommodated, particularly when matters relating to kings, their nobles, issues of governance, and administration were at hand. The various facets of Persianization discussed above also reconfirm the fact that it was most germane in the cases of those segments of the region's society which were closely linked to the system of Mughal/nawabi governance and had imbibed its political culture. This point also raises the broader question of whether Persianization was distinct from Islamization in Bengal generally and in Mughal Bengal in particular.

Bengal's Islamization relates to a much broader phenomenon than Persianization. In the case of Bengal, Islamic culture was manifest in the various devotional cults and traditions that sprang up around the figures of Muslim pirs and Sufi saints, as well as in the emergence of new and hybrid deities. A considerable number of Muslim saints and divines had made their way to Bengal following the Turkish conquest of the region in the thirteenth century.[73] Mughal rule brought with it an even larger influx of Sufi saints to Bengal.[74] Richard Eaton's masterful study illustrates the formative role played by these Sufi saints and holy men in the processes of forest-clearing and land reclamation in the eastern Bengal delta and also the gradual 'Islamization' of this area.[75] Powerful devotional cults—in which both Hindus and Muslims participated—developed around many pirs and Sufi saints. Some of the best known among these include the cult of Khwaja Khizr or Khizr pir who was believed to have the power to save a person from drowning.[76] Similar other cults included the cult of Zindah Ghazi, believed to be a legendary protector of woodcutters and boatmen all over the eastern delta, the cult of Pir Badr, and many others.[77] Bengal's Sufi savants produced a significant corpus of theological literature which combined

Sufi mysticism with Vaishnava, Natha, Tantric, and other religious influences.[78] The presence of Islamic culture in Bengal was also manifest in the emergence of new hybrid deities—again worshipped often by both Hindus as well as Muslims—such as Satyanarayan/Satya pir, Dakshin Roy, and Ban Bibi.[79] Islam in Bengal was also associated with a multifaceted and vigorous vernacular literature which included the growth of the tradition of writing Bengali biographies of the Prophet Mohammed such as the *Nabi Bamsha* and *Rasul Bijoy* of the poet Sayyid Sultan,[80] the emergence of a category of panchali/performative literature centred around the miraculous powers and exploits of pirs (Pir or Ghazimangal), and the emergence of a genre of love stories concerning human characters.[81] Suitable examples of such love stories include the 'Vidya Sundar' of Sabirid Khan, the 'Laila Majnun' of Daulat Wazir Bahram Khan, and many others.[82] The love story of Vidya and Sundar, which also forms part of Bharatchandra Roy's *Annadamangalkavya,* was a favourite story that was told repeatedly by many authors—Hindu as well as Muslim—over several centuries.[83]

Yet, Persianization and Islamization were not totally unrelated and this could lead to a blurring of boundaries between the two. Alaol's *Laila Majnun* story was produced in a courtly environment with a Persianate ethos and by a poet who was familiar with the classics of Persian literature. But the audience for this story may not have been confined to a Persianized, courtly audience alone.[84] The outrage of the Vaishnava poet Jayananda at Bengali Brahmins developing a taste for reading Persian masnavis has been mentioned above. The same author was also shocked that Brahmins had taken to wearing socks and had become familiar with the use of guns/cannons. Here, thus, a literary taste for Persian masnavis combined with new sartorial styles (socks) and growing familiarity with new weaponry (guns/cannons) to create for Jayananda the apprehension that Brahmins of the time were succumbing to the attractions of Islamic culture.[85] Here, then, Persianization became subsumed within a broader Islamicate culture. In the end, though it may be useful for purposes of analysis to maintain a distinction between Persianization and Islamization but with the awareness that it may not always make sense to keep the two apart.

The Limits of Persianization

Having dealt with the currency and significance of Persianization in Mughal Bengal, it is equally important to be aware of its limitations.

Persianization in this milieu coexisted with other cultural traditions, the single most important one of which was undoubtedly the regional version of Brahminism.[86] As seen in Chapter 1, Brahminism had by default become the regional tradition—therefore, it was certainly seen as a 'Hindu' tradition, but also as something that was native and indigenous to the region itself. In Hindu Bengali society of the medieval and early modern periods, rajas and zamindars, often high-ranking officials of the Bengal sultanate as well as the Mughal regime in Bengal, also served as 'leaders' of Hindu Brahminical society. A large part of their claim to be cultural arbiters over their respective samajas as well as over their *praja*s (subjects) was grounded in their efforts to pose as exemplars of Brahminical social practice.

There is abundant evidence for the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, as well as earlier, to illustrate this aspect of Bengal's cultural life. This took the shape of generous support and patronage of Brahmins—particularly Brahmin scholars, the endowment of lands to Brahmin lineages, and encouragement and support of Brahminical/Sanskrit scholarship.[87] Rajas and zamindars vied with each other to host assemblies of Brahmins to debate and discuss aspects of Brahminical theology and, upon occasion, social practices associated with it. Lavish feasts and gifts on occasions such as weddings, funerals, and other events in zamindar families also provided opportunities for the display of largesse as well as steadfast devotion to Brahmins.[88] Even in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Bengali Hindu zamindars staged elaborate Vedic rituals. Bengali rajas were also known for endowing temples, bathing ghats, and other public and charitable institutions at places of Hindu pilgrimage like Benares and Brindavan.[89] As mentioned in Chapter 1, zamindars also maintained tols and *chatushpathi*s where Brahmin scholars provided an education in Sanskrit, Brahminical learning to boys of gentry families, along with schools, where boys from gentry families could be educated in Persian. These custodians of Bengal's Brahminical culture were also assiduous in building and consecrating temples.[90]

One of the most illustrative examples of the power of zamindars, especially Brahmin zamindars, to dictate social norms is evident in the case of Maharaja Krishnachandra Roy's strong opposition to the possibility of permitting widow remarriage in upper caste Brahminical society. Maharaja Rajballabh, one of the most powerful rajas and bureaucrats of nawabi Bengal made efforts to overturn the custom which prohibited widow remarriage for upper caste Hindu widows.

The raja's interest in this was derived apparently from the sad plight of his own daughter who was widowed as a child.

He adopted the strategy of hosting an assembly of Brahmins—lavishly fed and paid by him—to debate this issue and then to come up with a suitable verdict. To thwart the efforts of Rajballabh, Maharaja Krishnachandra Roy of Nadia hosted a rival assembly of Brahmin scholars for exactly the same purpose. But in this case, the verdict he sought and got from the invitees to his assembly was the reverse of what Rajballabh desired. The Raja of Nadia, posturing as the greatest arbiter of Brahminism among Bengal's zamindars on account of his own status as a Brahmin, effectively scotched the tentative effort to remove the ban on widow remarriage. Rajballabh's political power by dint of his connections at the Dhaka and Murshidabad darbars was much greater than that of the Raja of Nadia. In this case, there is no indication that he sought to defy Maharaja Krishnachandra in this matter; on the contrary, Raja Rajballabh reportedly let the issue drop. There are other examples too from the eighteenth century when aggressive behaviour by the Rajas of Nadia was condoned and accepted without protest by other zamindars—especially, non-Brahmin zamindars, who shied away from open confrontation with a high-status Brahmin raja and his circle of Brahmin scholars of high reputation.[91]

The literary and intellectual production of medieval and early modern Bengal was largely the result of support provided by zamindars and affluent gentry to poets and writers. This feature has also been noticed in Chapters 1, 2, and 3. This literary and intellectual output, in the period under review, was overwhelmingly coloured by a Brahminical/Sanskritic/Puranic ethos. The many Mangalkavyas about Dharma Thakur, Chandi, and other deities, as well as the many Ramayanas and Mahabaharatas and other types of panchalis composed in this era are illustrative of this. This feature of Bengali literature is in fact the most widely-held conventional characterization of it and there is not much point in further belabouring this issue. However, a few examples are useful to illustrate this point. The *Madanmohanbandana*, a well-known verse narrative about the Bargi attack on Bishnupur, was composed in the 1750s, just before the *Maharashtapurana* of Gangaram. The articulation of a different kind of political sensibility (different from the kind usually mirrored in Mangalkavya-type poems of this period) and awareness in Gangaram's work has been discussed at length in Chapter 3. The *Madanmohanbandana* composed at about the same time also focuses on the same issue—the problem of Maratha Bargi raids into

Bengal—but handles it in a manner more reminiscent of the 'classic' Mangalkavya or eulogies centred on various gods and goddesses. This narrative told the story of how the kingdom of Bishnupur, renowned for its strong tradition of Krishna devotion since the seventeenth century, was saved from pillage and oppression at the hands of the Bargis by Lord Madanmohan (Krishna) himself.[92] Baneshwar Bidyalankar, a protégé of the raja of Burdwan, composed a Sanskrit work entitled the *Chitrachampu* in which the same motif of Bargi invasion was used as a central structuring device. A remarkable literary work on its own, the *Chitrachampu* did not mirror the political culture and awareness that is evident in the *Maharashtapurana* and also in a segment of Bharatchandra Roy's long poem, the *Annadamangala*.[93]

What then was the place of Persianization in Bengali culture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries? It functioned as the public culture of the elites of Mughal Bengal, and particularly those associated with the political system. It did not supplant the regional Brahminical culture and its practices. Instead, Persianization coexisted with Bengal's own variant of regional Brahminism as a complementary cultural trajectory, each with its own perceived functions and domains. Persianate culture—whether expressed in dress, speech, or literary connoisseurship—was intended generally for the public, professional sphere inhabited by the region's landed aristocrats and gentry service lineages. Away from this sphere, in more 'domestic' private settings, adherence to Sanskritic/Brahminical culture was more of a norm. Raja Pratapaditya and his family celebrated events such as accession to the zamindari or the inauguration of a new city by staging elaborate ceremonies in temples and offering generous hospitality to Brahmins.[94] The same Pratapaditya was depicted as being adept in a Persianized courtly culture and sophistication during his stay at Delhi as a young prince. Raja Rajballabh's life shows a similar bifurcation between the pursuit of a Persianate culture and the pursuit of a Brahminical/ Sanskritic culture. As a high-ranking official of Nawab Ali Vardi Khan's government, Rajballabh was proficient in Persian and came from a family in which Persian literacy had almost become a family tradition. His portrait depicts him attired in the mode of a Mughal nobleman, which indeed he was. Back in his ancestral estate of Rajanagar, however, he was assiduous in showing generosity and support to Brahmins and a culture of Brahminical/Sanskritic scholarship, which yielded among other things a Sanskrit play composed in his honour entitled the *Raja Vijaya Natakam*.[95] When Rajballabh embarked on a building

programme in Rajnagar, the mansions and temples he built there did not emulate the evolving Islamic/Mughal style of architecture in Bengal, but rather, a vernacular architectural idiom.[96] Artistic representations from Mughal Bengal (both sculpture and otherwise) provide further corroborative testimony. The terracotta panels on the Bishnupur temples built mostly in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries also signal a separation of sorts between the public/'secular' and the domestic/religious spheres as it were. In panels depicting court scenes, many of the Hindu as well as Muslim male figures—presumably the aristocracy and royalty—are shown wearing the attire that had become standard, formal, courtly attire for men—Hindus as well as Muslims—in most parts of India with a history of not just Mughal rule, but Muslim rule. These figures are dressed in tight-fitting, ankle-length trousers, long tunics belted at the waist, and turbans.[97] In panels not depicting court scenes, but instead depicting, for instance, scenes of Vaishnava devotionalism via music and dance, male figures are dressed differently. They are shown to be bare-bodied, wearing dhotis, sometimes with a *chadar* around their shoulders.[98] In the remarkable collection of *paata-chitra*s (painted wooden covers of manuscripts) produced in Bishnupur during the same period, there is a painting said to depict the king and queen of Bishnupur. The royal couple is depicted as devoted Vaishnavas which of course they purported to be. Here the king does not wear trousers, tunic, or a turban; instead he is dhoti-clad and bare-headed.[99]

Yet this distinction between the public and domestic spheres for early modern Bengal needs to be used with caution. The scenario described here is not an exact replica of the public/private, outer/inner domains of culture described by Partha Chatterjee. In Partha Chatterjee's formulation, the private/inner or domestic sphere emerged as a bastion of indigenous cultural practice and values in contradistinction to the public/outer sphere associated with British colonial rule and its related influences. In the case of early modern Bengal, as noted above, a Persianized culture was generally associated much more with a public, political culture.[100] Yet the separation of public versus domestic cultures, associated with Persianized and Sanskritic/Brahminical cultures respectively, was neither rigid, nor absolute. For example, as Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrate, elements of a Persianized political culture were evident in the genealogies of high status jatis and lineages and Mangalkavyas written in praise of gods and goddesses. These types of narratives can hardly be regarded

as cultural artefacts associated solely with a public culture. Moreover, these two cultural traditions—the Bengali, Brahminical tradition and the Persianate tradition—were not always neatly separate and serving separate cultural milieus. The analysis in Chapter 3 of the Persianate, almost tarikh-like features in the *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana*, and the juxtaposition of Puranic/Sanskritic and Persianate elements in the 1808 *Rajabali* of Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar, as well as in the earlier Dhaka *Rajabali* and in Ramram Basu's *Raja Pratapaditya Charitra*, underline the need to acknowledge that these constitute important examples of the interpenetration of the Sanskritic/ Puranic and the Persianate literary and cultural conventions into each other's domains. Thus, the bifurcation of the public and domestic cultural spheres between the Persianate and the Sanksitic/Puranic was partial and far from absolute.

We have so far portrayed the regional manifestation of Mughal rule over Bengal as an important vehicle for the dissemination and transmission of Mughal, Persianate culture. But what relationship did the Mughal ruling class have with Bengal's indigenous culture? The received wisdom is that the pre-Mughal sultans of Bengal were enthusiastic supporters of regional vernacular literature and culture; the advent of Mughal rule reversed this trend. It is undoubted that, as a Mughal subah and later as a Mughal successor state, the ruling authorities of Bengal clearly proclaimed their dedication to preserving a Mughal political and governmental culture. As discussed in Chapter 5, in these circumstances, the absence of any known Persian language tarikh composed in Bengal, at the behest of the nawabs of Murshidabad or their nobles, or the Mughal subahdars in the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, remains a not yet adequately explained or understood phenomenon. It is also true that the large corpus of Bengali vernacular literature between the late sixteenth and eighteenth centuries do not contain references to Mughal subahdars or the Murshidabad nawabs as their patrons and supporters. However, there is fairly significant evidence of contacts among the Murshidabad nawabs on the one hand, and Hindu religious sects, Brahmin poets, and scholars on the other.[101] Authors of Persian language tarikhs about the Murshidabad nawabs—whether Ghulam Hussain Tabatabai, Karam Ali, or the others—do not even mention such matters in their voluminous works. Yet, such relationships existed and their implications definitely need to be teased out further. No ruling regime could, of course, afford to be totally indifferent to the cultural traditions

of the vast majority of its subjects. The nawabi ruling class too seems to have made gestures—the full extent of which are not yet fully known or appreciated—in this direction. The Bera-Bhashan festival developed in honour of Khizr Pir was given official recognition by Muqarrab Khan, the Mughal subahdar of Bengal during 1626–7, and by Nawab Murshid Quli Khan during the early eighteenth century.[102] In the *Chitrachampu*, Baneshwar Bidyalankar reported that in his search for royal/aristocratic patrons, he had first visited the court of the Raja of Burdwan and then the nawab's court at Murshidabad. Baneshwar made this observation in a matter-of-fact manner—almost as if it was commonplace for Brahmin scholars/poets of repute to show up as supplicants at the Murshidabad darbar.[103] Other Brahmin scholars were also honoured and feted at court by the Nawabs. On the death of Nawab Ali Vardi Khan, Sirajuddaula is said to have invited Brahmins to attend the funeral services of the former and the letters of invitation were composed in Bengali.[104] Investigating the implications of even such snippets of information about the relationship between the Murshidabad nawabs and local, vernacular culture is a subject of utmost importance. Unfortunately, it lies beyond the scope of this book. What it means, though, is that the existing view about the indifference of the Bengal nawabs to local, vernacular culture needs to be re-examined and reformulated.

Notes

1. Richard M. Eaton, 'Islamic History as World History', in Michael Adas (ed.), *Islamic Expansion and European Expansion: The Forging of a Global Order*, Philadelphia, 1993, pp. 1–36.

2. I do not use the term 'translation' here in its literal sense but rather in the sense understood and used in Tony K. Stewart, 'In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving the Muslim-Hindu Encounter Through Translation Theory', in Richard M. Eaton (ed.), *India's Islamic Traditions, 711–1750*, New Delhi, 2003, pp. 363–92, and 'Introduction', Ibid., pp. 1–34.

3. Ibid.

4. Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, London, 1992, p. 48.

5. Ibid., p. 48.

6. E.G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, vol. 2, Cambridge, 1969, p. 4.

7. Ehsan Yarshater, 'The Persian Presence in the Islamic World', in Richard G. Hovhannisian and Georges Sabagh (eds), *The Persian Presence in the Islamic World*, Cambridge, 1998, p. 5.

8. Stephen F. Dale, *The Garden of the Eight Paradises: Babur and the Culture of Empire in Central Asia and India (1483–1530)*, Leiden, 2004.

9. Hourani, p. 87.

10. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Persianization and "Mercantilism" in Bay of Bengal History, 1400–1700', in *Explorations in Connected History. From the Tagus to the Ganges*, 2004, Delhi, pp. 45–79.

11. Subrahmanyam, 'Persianization and "Mercantilism"', and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Iranians Abroad: Intra-Asian Elite Migration and Early Modern State Formation', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 51, no. 2, 1992, pp. 340–62.

12. Phillip Wagoner, '"Sultan among Hindu Kings": Dress, Titles, and Islamicization of Hindu Culture at Vijaynagara', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 55, no. 4, 1996, pp. 851–80.

13. Sheldon Pollock, 'The Sanskrit Cosmopolis, 300–1300 CE: Transculturation, Vernacularization and the Question of Ideology', in *Ideology and Status of Sanskrit*, pp. 197–248.

14. J.N. Adams, Mark Janse, and Simon Swain (eds), *Bilingualism in Ancient Society: Language Contact and the Written Text*, Oxford, 2002; Erich S. Gruen, *Studies in Greek Culture and Roman Policy*, Leiden, 1990; Sheldon Pollock, *The Language of the Gods in the World of Men: Sanskrit, Culture and Power in Pre-Modern India*, Berkeley, 2006.

15. Muzaffar Alam, 'The Culture and Politics of Persian in Pre-Colonial Hindustan', in *Literary Cultures in History*, Pollock (ed.), Berkeley, 2003, p. 158.

16. Alam, 'The Culture and Politics of Persian', p. 70.

17. Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'The Making of a Munshi', in *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2004, pp. 61–72.

18. Velcheru Narayana Rao, David Shulman, and Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time. Writing History in South India 1600–1800*, New Delhi, 2001.

19. Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb*, Bombay, 1966; Athar Ali, *The Apparatus of Empire: Awards, Ranks, Offices and Titles in the Mughal Nobility (1574–1658)*, New Delhi, 1985; Afzal Hussain, *The Nobility under Akbar and Jehangir: A Study of Family Groups*, New Delhi, 1999. See also Sanjay Subrahmanyam, 'Iranians Abroad'.

20. Muzaffar Alam, Francoise 'Nalini' Delvoye, and Marc Gaborieau (eds), *The Making of Indo-Persian Culture: Indian and French Studies*, New Delhi, 2000; J.P. Losty, *The Art of the Book in India*, London, 1982; Lizzie Collingham, *Curry: A Tale of Cooks and Conquerors*, New York, 2006.

21. A large literature exists on the subject of European courtly culture. While both Norbert Elias, *The Court Society*, Oxford, 1983, and Norbert Elias (tr. Norman Jephcott), *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners and State Formation and Civilization*, Oxford, 1994 are landmark works on this subject, other representative works include Anna Bryson, *From Courtesy to Civility: Changing Codes of Conduct in Early Modern England*, New York, 1998; Jorge Arditi, *A Genealogy of Manners: Transformations of Social Relations in France and England from the Fourteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, Chicago, 1998.

22. Daud Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life in Early Medieval India*, Cambridge, 2004.

23. Muzaffar Alam, *The Languages of Political Islam. India 1200–1800*, Chicago, 2004.

24. J.F. Richards, 'Norms of Comportment among Imperial Mughal Officers', in *Moral Conduct and Authority. The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, Barbara Metcalf (ed.), 1984, Berkeley, pp. 255–89; also J.F. Richards, 'The Formulation of Imperial Authority under Akbar and Jehangir', in Muzaffar Alam and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds), *The Mughal State. 1526–1750*, New Delhi, 1998, pp. 126–67.

25. Adab means discipline/training; also good breeding and refinement. See Barbara Metcalf, 'The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam', in *Moral Conduct and Authority*, pp. 1–20.

26. Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Issues of Masculinity in North Indian History: the Bangash Nawabs of Farrukhabad', *Indian Journal of Gender Studies*, vol. 1, 1997, pp. 1–18; Rosalind O'Hanlon, 'Manliness and Imperial Service in Mughal North India', *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 42, no. 1, 1999, pp. 47–93.

27. See for example, Maulavi M. Hidayat Husain, 'The Mirza Namah (The Book of the Perfect Gentleman) of Mirza Kamran with an English Translation', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, new series, vol. 9, 1913, pp. 1–13.

28. Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life*, pp. 22–3, 100–2.

29. Subrahmanyam, 'Persianization and "Mercantilism"', pp. 77–9.

30. Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life*, pp. 22–3.

31. K. Chatterjee, 'Cultural Cross-Currents and Cosmopolitanism in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century South Asia: The Case of Bishnupur', unpublished paper presented at the Association for Asian Studies Annual Conference, Atlanta, April 2008.

32. Alam and Subrahmanyam (eds), *The Mughal State*, pp. 70–1; Ali, *Courtly Culture and Political Life*, pp. 1–25, 262–71.

33. Eaton, *India's Islamic Traditions*, p. 6.

34. Ibid.

35. Richard M. Eaton, *The Rise of Islam and the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760*, Delhi, 1994, p. 167.

36. S.N.H. Rizvi, 'Literary Extracts from Kitab Subh Sadiq', *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Pakistan*, 16 (1), 1971, pp. 1–61.

37. John R. McLane, *Land and Local Kingship in Eighteenth Century Bengal*, Cambridge, 1993, pp. 130–7; Nagendranath Basu, *Uttar Rarhiya Kayastha Kanda*, Calcutta, 1335 BS, pp. 195–6; Nagendranath Basu, *Dakshin Rarhiya Kayastha Khanda*, Calcutta, 1340 BS, p. 101.

38. Suniti Kumar Chatterji, *Origin and Development of the Bengali Language*, New Delhi, 2002, pp. 202–6.

39. Rasiklal Gupta, *Maharaj Rajballabh Sen,* 1st edn, Calcutta, n.d. pp. 45–8 (two different editions of this work have been used in this book. Unless otherwise mentioned, all subsequent citations refer to this first edition).

40. Huq, *Muslim Bengali Literature*, p. 105.

41. Ibid.

42. Gupta, *Maharaj Rajballabh Sen,* p. 70.

43. Rao-Shulman-Subrahmanyam, *Textures of Time*.

44. Ramram Basu, *Raja Pratapaditya Charitra,* p. 5.

45. Ibid., p. 9.

46. Ibid., p. 50.

47. Gupta, *Maharaj Rajballabh Sen,* p. 73.

48. Saradacharan Dhar, *Nabab Harekrishna,* Calcutta: no publisher, 1910, p. 10; Sukumar Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa,* vol. 2, 1405 BS, Calcutta, p. 155.

49. Abdul Karim, 'Islamabad', in *Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad Granthabali,* Abul Ahsan Chowdhury (ed.), vol. 1, Dhaka, 1997, p. 73.

50. Basu, *Raja Pratapaditya Charitra,* p. 5.

51. Cited in Sen, *Bangla Sahityer Itihasa,* vol. 2, p. 159.

52. N. Bandyopadhyaya, *Bhadrapurer Itibritta,* Murshidabad, 1910–11;

Kshitishvamsavalicharitam: A Chronicle of the Family of Raja Krishnachandra of Navadvipa, Bengal, W. Pertsch (ed. and tr.) in Mohit Roy (ed.), *Kshitishvamsavalicharit*, Calcutta, 1986.

53. Rizvi, 'Literary Extracts from Kitab Subh Sadiq', pp. 1–61.

54. Shantanu Phukan, 'Through a Persian Prism: Hindi and Padmavat in the Mughal Imagination', unpublished PhD dissertation, 2000, University of Chicago, pp. 8–9.

55. Jayananda, *Chaitanyamangal*, Sukhamoy Mukhopadhyaya and Sumangal Rana (eds), 1994, Shantiniketan, p. 135; J.T. O'Connell, 'Vaishnava Perceptions of Muslims in Sixteenth Century Bengal', in *Subordinate and Marginal Groups in Early India*, Aloka Parashar-Sen (ed.), New Delhi, 2004, p. 417 disagrees that these lines of Jayananda's *Chaitanyamangala* refer to 'masnavis'. Following Mohammed Enamul Huq, *History of Muslim Bengali Literature*, 1957, Karachi, p. 42 and M.R. Tarafdar 'Kulaji Sahityer Aitihasikata', in *Itihasa O Aitihasika*, Dhaka, 1989, I interpret these lines to refer to 'masnavis'.

56. Rizvi, 'Literary Extracts from Kitab Subh Sadiq', p. 10.

57. Ibid.

58. Allison Busch, 'The Anxiety of Innovation': The Practice of Literary Science in the Hindi/*Riti* Tradition', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East,* vol. 24, no. 2, 2004, pp. 45–57; Allison Busch, 'Literary Response to the Mughal Imperium: The Historical Poems of Keshavdas', *South Asia Research*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2005, pp. 31–54. See also Cynthia Talbot, 'Becoming Turk the Rajput Way: Conversion and Identity in an Indian Warrior Narrative', *Modern Asian Studies* (forthcoming).

59. Ramram Basu, *Raja Pratapaditya Charitra*, p. 60.

60. Ibid., pp. 60–70.

61. *Bharatchandra Granthabali,* Bandyopadhyaya and Das (eds), p. 26; Nagendranath Basu, *Barendra Brahman Bibaran*, p. 163. I am grateful to Allison Busch for verifying that these compositions attributed to Raja Pratapaditya and Bharatchandra Roy were in Brajbhasha.

62. *Bharatchandra Granthabali,* pp. 25–6.

63. For example, see Suniti Kumar Chatterji, *Origin and Development of the Bengali Language,* pp. 201–6.

64. Pertsch, *Kshitish,* pp. 246–7.

65. Bandyopadhyaya, *Bhadrapurer Itibritta*, p. 20; Gupta, *Maharaj Rajballabh Sen,* pp. 70–3.

66. Maharshi Debendranath Thakur, *Atmajibani*, Satish Chandra

Chakrabarti (ed.), Calcutta, 1927; Dinesh Chandra Sen, *Gharer Katha O Juga Sahitya*, Calcutta, 1969 (rpt), pp. 28, 78–9.

67. Purnachandra Mazumdar, *The Musnud of Murshidabad*, Murshidabad, 1905, p. 80.

68. Ibid., pp. 80, 83–9.

69. *List of Arabic and Persian Manuscripts acquired on behalf of the Government of India by the Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1903–1907*, Calcutta, 1908; *List of Arabic and Persian Manuscripts acquired on behalf of the Government of India by the Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1908–1910*, Calcutta, n.d.

70. 1908–10 list, pp. 8, 9, 14, 25, 32.

71. Ghosh, *Memoirs of Maharaja Nubkissen Bahadur,* cited in Aloke Roy, 'Paribarik Pustak Samgraha', *Ababhash*, October–December, 2003, pp. 110–11.

72. Rasiklal Gupta, *Maharaj Rajballabh Sen,* Calcutta, pp. 2–4, Mahimaniranjan Chakrabarti, *Birbhum Bibaran,* Calcutta, p. 16.

73. Huq, *Muslim Bengali Literature,* p. 43.

74. Ibid., pp. 102–4.

75. Eaton, *Islam and the Bengal Frontier.*

76. Huq, *Muslim Bengali Literature*, pp. 103–4.

77. Eaton, *Islam and the Bengal Frontier*, p. 209.

78. For a discussion of such religious literature, see Tony K. Stewart, 'In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving the Muslim–Hindu Encounter through Translation Theory', in Richard M. Eaton (ed.), *India's Islamic Traditions, 711–1750*, pp. 363–92; also M.R. Tarafdar, *Hussain Shahi Bengal: A Socio-Political Study*, pp. 182–225.

79. For discussions of Satyanarayan/Satya Pir, see Tony K. Stewart, 'Alternate Structures of Authority: Satya Pir on the Frontiers of Bengal', in David Gilmartin and Bruce B. Lawrence (eds), *Beyond Turk and Hindu: Rethinking Religious Identities in Islamicate South Asia*, Gainesville, 2000, pp. 2154; Girindranath Das, *Bangla Pir Sahityer Katha,* Barasat 1338 BS; Satyanarayan Bhattacharya (ed.), *Kobi Krishnaram Daser Granthabali*, see 'Introduction', no pp.

80. Huq, *Muslim Bengali Literature,* pp. 110–22.

81. Sukumar Sen, *Islami Bangla Sahitya*, pp. 62–87; Bandyopadhyaya and Das (eds), *Bharatchandra Granthabali*; Satyanarayan Bhattacharya (ed.), *Kobi Krishnaram Daser Granthabali*; Tony K. Stewart, *Fabulous Females and Peerless Pirs: Tales of Mad Adventures in Old Bengal,* New York, 2004.

82. Huq, *Muslim Bengali Literature*, pp. 64–9 and 75–7.

83. Bandyopadhyaya and Das (eds), *Bharatchandra Granthabali*, pp. 5–35.

84. Huq, *Muslim Bengali Literature*; Chowdhury (ed.), *Abdul Karim Sahitya Bisharad Granthabali*; Sukumar Sen, *Islami Bangla Sahitya*.

85. Jayananda, *Birachita Chaitanyamangala*, p. 135.

86. See Phillip B. Wagoner, 'Sultan among Hindu Kings: Dress, Titles, and Islamization of Hindu Culture at Vijaynagar', *Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 55, no. 4, 1996, pp. 851–80 for a useful and relevant discussion of Islamization and Sanskritization.

87. Aloke Kumar Chakrabarty, *Maharaja Krishnachandra O Tatkalin Banga Samaj*, Calcutta, 1989.

88. Ramram Basu, *Raja Pratapaditya Charitra*, pp. 95–109; N.N. Ghosh, *Memoirs of Maharaj Nubkissen Bahadur*, Calcutta, 1901, pp. 178–83; Chakrabarty, *Maharaja Krishnachandra;* Pradip Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, Calcutta, 1978, pp. 62–85.

89. Gupta, *Maharaj Rajballabh Sen*; Sinha, *Calcutta in Urban History*, etc.

90. See Chakrabarty, *Maharaja Krishnachandra.*

91. Gupta, *Maharaj Rajballabh Sen*, pp. 192–9; Chakrabarty, *Maharaja Krishnachandra*, pp. 49–76.

92. Edward C. Dimock Jr and Pratul Chandra Gupta (eds), *Maharashtapurana. An Eighteenth Century Bengali Historical Text*, Calcutta, 1985 (rpt), pp. 63–6.

93. Baneshwar Bidyalankar, *Chitrachampu*, Ramcharan Chakrabarty (ed.), Benaras, 1940.

94. Basu, *Raja Pratapaditya Charitra,* pp. 41–2, 94.

95. R.C. Majumdar and Kunja Gobinda Goswami (eds), *Raja Vijaya Natakam,* Calcutta, 1947.

96. Gupta, *Maharaj Rajballabh Sen,* see illustrations of the mansions and temples built by Rajballabh (no page nos). On the subject of elites, in early modern India, inhabiting and negotiating among multiple cultural spheres, see Cynthia Talbot, 'Becoming Turk the Rajput Way', *Modern Asian Studies,* forthcoming.

97. This kind of attire became standard for male gentry into the nineteenth century. Well-known portraits of Raja Rammohan Roy, Prince Dwarakanath Tagore, and others show them dressed in this way.

98. These remarks are based on observation of sculpture panels on the well-known terracotta temples at Bishnupur, West Bengal. Art-historical

studies of these temples include Chittaranjan Dasgupta, *Bharater Shilpa-Samskritir Patabhumikaye Bishnupurer Mandir Terrakota*, Bishnupur, 1407 BS; Pika Ghosh, *Temple to Love: Architecture and Devotion in Seventeenth Century Bengal*, Bloomington, 2005; and others

99. This statement is based generally on an observation of the *paata-chitras* in the possession of the Jogesh Chandra Roy Bidyanidhi Purakriti Bhaban, Bishnupur, West Bengal. The specific paata-chitra referred to here was produced at Bishnupur, and is subsequently in the possession of the Ashutosh Museum, Calcutta University.

100. Chatterjee, *The Nation and its Fragments*, pp. 116–34.

101. Ghosh, *Memoirs of Maharaj Nubkissen Bahadur*, pp. 4–7; Ghatak, *Charitashtaka*, pp. 13–14; Satyacharan Shastri, *Maharaj Nandakumar Charit*, Calcutta, 1899, pp. 207–10; Ramendrasundar Tribedi, 'Ek Kahni Prachin Dalil', *Sahitya Parishat Patrika*, vol. 6, no. 4, 1306 BS, pp. 297–301.

102. Huq, *Muslim Bengali Literature*, p. 194.

103. Baneshwar Bidyalankar, *Chitrachampu*, p. 8.

104. Chintaharan Chakrabarti, 'Samskrita Sahitye Musalmaner Prerana', *Sahitya Parishat Patrika*, vol. 44, no. 1, 1344 BS, pp. 39–46.

Conclusion and Afterthoughts

In the 1920s a bitter public controversy about the definition and substance of history divided the Bengali scholarly world into two opposing groups. This feud revolved around the body of genealogical materials that have been discussed in Chapter 2. This debate erupted at a time and in an environment which was significantly different from the Mughal period and very early colonial milieu which provide the time frame of this study. In the course of this debate, a group of scholars including eminent professional historians and archaeologists such as R.C. Majumdar, Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyaya, and others debunked the status of the Bengali kulagrantha corpus as history on the grounds that their chronology could not be determined with certainty; the claims put forward by these materials were not verifiable; and, most serious of all, the identity and background of the composers of these chronicles could not often be ascertained.[1] This debate, in a nutshell, summarizes much of the burden borne by pre-modern historiography in India as unfit to be assigned the status of history. This debate also allows us an opportunity to summarize the findings of this book about the nature and function of historiographic narratives in early modern India.

The principal conclusion that emerges from an exploration of a variety of materials is that the commemoration of the past in the form of narratives was articulated via the cultural and literary conventions prevalent in the time and place where these narratives were produced and used. Thus, general, non-particularistic, universal criteria such as rationality and empiricism, are not the most appropriate yardsticks for evaluating their historicity. Pre-modern historiographic materials do not and should not be expected to correspond completely to the modern definition of history—especially professional history—as a rational,

factual discipline practised by professional scholars credentialized by universities. The common ground shared by the pre-modern South Asian notion of history, whether called itihasa, or designated through various other terms, with history in its current sense consists of the fact that both comprise the practice of engaging in a self-conscious commemoration of various aspects of the past. Secondly, both involve an interpretive engagement with the past through a presentation of sequences of events and the reconstruction of causes and connections that linked them. Any casual or random reference to an event or fact that had occurred in the past does not, in my view, qualify early modern materials to be regarded as historical. Eighteenth century Bengali authors and poets, such as Baneshwar Bidyalankar in his *Chitrachampu* and Bharatchandra Roy in his *Annadamangala,* referred to the waves of Bargi attacks that had convulsed Bengal in the mid-eighteenth century. However, both authors used these invasions as reference points to delineate the time when they composed these works. The Bargi invasions seemed to possess no further narrative utility in these compositions. As the discussion in Chapter 3 shows, this contrasts markedly with the manner in which Gangaram, author of the *Maharashtapurana,* used the Bargi attacks as the central lynchpin of his narrative. In the *Maharashtapurana,* the Bargi raids functioned as the central phenomenon that explained the actions, reactions, motives, perspectives, and counter-perspectives of the various groups of protagonists who are represented in it. Also as seen in Chapter 3, Bharatchandra did the same with his treatment of the military campaigns of Raja Man Singh in Bengal, particularly the defining battle against Raja Pratapaditya of Jessore. The biggest points of difference between early modern history writing on the one hand, and the classic modern practice of history on the other, lay in the use of a rational-positivist methodology by the latter. However, we may need to modify the conventional assumption that early modern historiography was indifferent to method and authority. The large body of scholarly commentary on the lack of proper history in pre-modern India usually points to fabulous, fantastic stories and accounts as the typical nature of such materials and the prime reason why these should not be dignified by the label of history. There is, of course, no doubt that fantastic and fabulous stories indeed constituted an important facet of these narratives. As Chapters 2 to 6 illustrate, the fantastic and the fabulous were paired with extremely worldly and material concerns regarding issues of urgency and importance to communities, kings, and others. Perhaps the more critical point this book makes is the recognition that

early modern historiography did not always possess all the properties associated with modern, rational-positivist history; this should not lead to the dismissal of the former as a flawed, earlier incarnation of empirical, rational-scientific history-writing and be left at that. Early modern history writing needs to be explored as a rich and meaningful field which constituted a valuable medium of cultural expression of the societies that composed and used them.

The decisive influence of prevailing literary, intellectual, and cultural conventions in shaping the content, idiom, and style of composing history during the early modern period makes it necessary to give due emphasis and weight to the time, place, and cultural context in which the narratives studied in this book were produced. Chapter 1 establishes the political and cultural environment of seventeenth and eighteenth century Bengal and shows that Mughal rule produced a deeper cultural impact on this region than previously appreciated. With respect to certain segments of Bengal's society in particular, Mughal rule and the political culture associated with it became significant influences in shaping the composition of certain kinds of historiographic narratives.

Historiographic materials were not just textual, but often simultaneously oral and performative as well. This helped in the wider dissemination of the issues and topics contained in historiographic narratives to a bigger audience. Some types of narratives—for example, the royal charitras and the Persian tarikhs presented in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively—were probably more suitable for silent reading. But the fact that history, embedded in various kinds of literature, could be delivered through oral and performative modes meant that considerations of literacy did not restrict the size of audiences. The authors of historiographic narratives, whether village poets or sophisticated courtiers and nobles, drew upon their intellectual and cultural orientations—shaped in some measure by systems of formal education—to produce accounts of past kings and lineage chiefs, etc. In the period under discussion, systems of education as well as the culture prevalent among the gentry and nobility of Bengal favoured adherence to a Bengali vernacular, Sanskritic, and Persianized culture.

The narratives studied in Chapters 2 to 6 are about rulers of various kinds—ranging from the Mughals who were paramount within the South Asian subcontinent, to rulers who occupied positions at lower levels of the hierarchies of political power. Most types of histories studied here focus on relations among rulers with different degrees of political

power and the ethical and moral foundations of governance, but from markedly different perspectives. The ubiquitousness of narratives about kings can justifiably lead to the articulation of a contrast between pre-modern histories and modern histories on the grounds that while the former were monarch-centric, the latter perceived of the people as the basis of communities, such as the nation state for example. The distinction between histories that identified the people as the basis of the nation and early modern king-centric narratives is undeniable. However, it is worth remembering that early modern historiographic narratives and chronicles about royalty, in a sense, also encapsulated the people. As many different types of histories from the early modern era—the Persian tarikhs, charitras, royal genealogies, and others—indicate, rulers not only exerted political and military power, but also embodied the moral stature of the kingdom as a whole. The king's adherence to the norms of righteousness caused the heavens to smile on the ruler as well as his subjects; the king's ethical lapses cost both dearly. This link between the king and his subjects also explains why ordinary people listened and read such historiographic narratives with attention and interest. Besides, rulers and the circles of courtiers and protégées around them were typically the patrons, authors, and sometimes the prime audiences for certain types of histories in the early modern period.

It is true that a large corpus of pre-modern historiographic materials were seemingly oblivious to methodology. They were often embedded in stories and accounts that were meant to edify and entertain people, as well as to provide them with reading and listening pleasure. The inherent connection between itihasa, katha, and akhyayika with kavya has already been explored in the Introduction. As Gautam Bhadra's insightful analysis of the meaning, concept, and functions of history, or itihasa, in pre-modern India illustrates, itihasa was meant to be suffused with aesthetic qualities (rasa) which in turn would provide enjoyment to its readers. As Bhadra writes, 'here, the resolution of doubt [regarding the factual accuracy of the narrative] was not the principal objective, but rather, its pleasing literary qualities ['*manoharitva*']'.[2] The book's study of panchali literature—particularly, its Mangalkavya sub-type—provides a confirmation of this point. Yet it would be erroneous to believe that considerations of authority, legitimacy, and proof were totally absent from these materials.

Whether speaking about the exploits of the goddess, actions of past kings, or lineage heads, such accounts needed to win the respect and belief of their audiences. Otherwise, why else would narratives of this

type be composed and heard or read repeatedly over centuries? The entertainment value and pleasing aesthetics certainly go some way in explaining the longevity of certain types of historiography. However, these by themselves may not completely explain their long life and popularity. The authority of such narratives was not always derived from the careful collection of factual evidence which had been cross checked for accuracy.

I suggest that the authority implicit in narratives such as the kulajis and the Mangalkabyas were rooted in very different sets of considerations. The authority of such accounts sprang from the fact that they were perceived to be drawn from 'aitihya' or tradition. Previous renderings of these accounts endowed them with the authority of tradition, the credibility of which could be, in turn, traced to several factors. First, the credibility of these accounts resided in the fact that earlier generations of the same families and communities had listened to them or read them and considered them worthy of respect and attention. Secondly, these accounts were believed to be derived from the sayings and experiences of wise, honourable people who commanded respect in the community. This facet of itihasa was in fact of very ancient vintage. According to the ancient *Samkhyakaras*, for example, itihasa was practically synonymous with *aptavakya* (the sayings of persons of high moral stature, wisdom, and integrity) and not everyone could claim the status of an 'apta'. As Gautam Bhadra points out, in ancient India, the memories of great men literally constituted smriti which can be considered to be practically synonymous with law.[3] These memories formed the basis for the composition of *samhitas* or digests. The link between itihasa, or history, and the memories and sayings of respected members of the community becomes clearer when we consider that, by some definitions, itihasa was not necessarily associated with an identifiable author, but was regarded as a mass of hearsay and stories circulating within a community and surviving through their transmission as tradition.[4]

In Bengal's panchali literature in general, it was often the convention for writers to submerge their individual author-function in the generic literary/historiographic tradition within which they located their compositions. Writers also chose to attribute their compositions to better-known authors in order to associate themselves with the reputation and legitimacy of the latter. In cases where panchali literature had identifiable authors, these composers quite commonly provided autobiographical details. I suggest that behind the plethora of family and community connections within which authors often located

their individual selves, there functioned a clear purpose: to establish a respectable identity for the author in order to secure for his/her composition a degree of credibility and acceptance from those who would listen to or read it. The deliberate references to the local raja or eminent person, whose patronage often made it possible for a writer to devote time and energy to the composition of a literary/historiographic work, represented signals to associate both the author and his/her work with persons of prestige and honour within the community.

The Indo-Persian tarikh tradition too betrayed a similar concern with delineating the identity of the author together with his personal familial background, professional, and social connections, and the identities of his patrons and mentors. Such protocols were intended to convey messages regarding the credibility and qualification of authors as well as the stature and respectability of the company they kept. The Bengal tarikhs also referred to older authorities—usually earlier tarikhs—but also at times, older persons with experience and wisdom who had experienced at first hand or knew about the events which were chronicled in the tarikhs. This feature is noticeable too in the charitras composed by Ramram Basu and Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya, and in the *Rajabali* of Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar. These authors made explicit invocations to various pre-existing and well established traditions and authorities in order to provide validity for the contents of their works. The English officials of the East India Company depended on Indo-Persian tarikhs as their authorities.

A more self-conscious and explicit methodology is also noticeable in the tarikhs and the Bengali prose narratives discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. In these narratives, the authors revealed their knowledge about the existence of multiple versions of the same narrative and took pains to decide which one they considered valid and why. Even an author such as Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar, usually regarded as a typical, orthodox Brahman pundit, expressed his scepticism about the explanation given in the *Puranetihasa* tradition regarding the origin of the earth. Still, early modern protocols of writing history were different from the protocols, conventions, and institutional affiliations associated with the modern profession of history writing. But the materials explored in Chapters 2 to 6 compel us to acknowledge that early modern historiography followed protocols of authority, evidence, and method which were different, but not absent.

The historiographic materials presented in this book also bear eloquent testimony to the fact that they functioned as political

statements that were attuned to the contingent material and cultural environments in which they were produced and received. The narratives analysed in Chapters 2 to 6 make it impossible to subscribe to the view that pre-modern Indian history was synonymous with ancient tradition and the compulsions of embodying such tradition rendered it formulaic, unchanging, and disconnected to current material and political contexts. The genealogical texts surveyed in Chapter 2 and the Mangalkabyas studied in Chapter 3 illustrate the ability—maybe even the need—for tradition to re-invent and re-cast itself periodically while preserving intact some hallmark features and attributes of old. The Persian tarikhs composed in Bengal during the later eighteenth century followed the generic forms and styles that were associated with the Indo-Persian tarikh tradition. Yet, in keeping with the political exigencies facing the class of Mughal scholar-aristocrats, the authors of these tarikhs used the history of the Mughal empire, and its reincarnation in Bengal under the nawabs of Murshidabad, to articulate a political philosophy that was an innovation on the classic Mughal philosophy of governance. A similar strategy is noticeable in the Bengali prose biography of Maharaja Krishnachandra Roy of Nadia authored by Rajiblochan Mukhopadhyaya. In this charitra, which was written during the period when the English East India Company had assumed sovereign power in Bengal, the author depicted the English as noble, ethical people and his hero, the raja of Nadia, as one of the chief enablers of English political ascendancy in Bengal.

The recognition that the traditions of history current in early modern India were sensitive to their immediate political and cultural environments makes it possible to establish a stronger connection between the various types of historiographic narratives presented in this book and the prevalent political culture of seventeenth and eighteenth century Bengal. By this period, the Mughal imperial formation had come to be associated with a courtly culture which was strongly Persianized. The Persian language and a literary culture associated with it embodied this imperial culture most typically, but it was also linked to certain modes of deportment, attire, musical tastes, and so on. As Chapter 7 shows, forming part of a trans-regional culture, Persianization was prevalent over large parts of the 'Eastern' Islamic world. It represented the secular, political, courtly, and cosmopolitan aspects of Islamic civilization. Within the South Asian subcontinent, the Persian language and a Persianized culture had begun to take root since the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. But its most significant

strengthening and dissemination occurred under Mughal rule thanks to its use as the language of administration. Provincial gentry and aristocracy in Bengal cultivated the Persian language and appropriated different aspects of a Persianized culture. The greater use of Persian in Mughal Bengal is acknowledged in existing scholarly literature and its diffusion among certain segments of Bengali society is traced to the status of Persian as a language of career advancement. Linguists attest to the philological impact of Persian on the Bengali language in the form of the entrance of Persian vocabulary into Bengali particularly during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While these assessments are true, they overlook and ignore the fact that, for several centuries, Persian had also become a language of sophistication and cosmopolitanism among the Bengali gentry and aristocracy, particularly in the culture prevalent in the public-political sphere. The contribution of this book to the study of historical cultures in early modern Bengal emphasizes the place and role of Persianization as a medium of refinement and a link to the political culture of the Mughal empire.

In certain types of historiographic narratives composed in Bengal during the early modern period, Persianization is evident at the most basic level by the profuse use of Persian vocabulary. It is also evident in the idioms, issues and overall political parameters outlined in them. This is true of the two mid-eighteenth century Mangalkavyas, that is, the *Annadamangala* and the *Maharashtapurana* as well as the prose texts studied in Chapter 4. Bengal's kulagrantha corpus supposedly embodies the region's Brahmanical tradition in its most orthodox form. The kulajis retained their commitment to their most important Brahmanical priorities, but also accommodated references to the professional and social-cultural interactions between upper class, upper caste Hindus on the one hand and Muslim regimes—including the Mughal—on the other. The English language accounts composed by associates of the English East India Company used the Persian tarikhs as the basis for remarks and reflections on Mughal governance.

The endeavour to trace inflections of a Persianized culture in diverse forms and modes of historiographic materials composed in Bengal also brings us face to face with a scenario in which multiple cultures of writing history were concurrently prevalent at the same period and in the same place. Recent scholarship is cognizant of the multilingualism of many regions of early modern India and of the simultaneous currency of multiple literary and historiographic cultures in these places.[5] However, the older tendency to perceive of pre-modern historiographic practice in

particular as separate traditions of 'Hindu' and 'Islamic' history writing may not yet have been laid to rest completely.

This study also provides an opportunity to examine the relationship of the Mughal empire to one of its regions—and more particularly to the issue of the reception of the empire and its political culture by its provincial subjects. The relationship and interaction between Mughal imperial culture and regional, cultural traditions have yet to receive the scholarly attention and importance it deserves, particularly from historians. Contrary to the conventional picture of Mughal rule in Bengal as oppressive, violent, and 'foreign', the finding here is that by the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, ordinary Bengalis had come to accept the Mughals as distant, paramount overlords who were compared sometimes to divinity. The gentry and aristocracy of Bengal, who had direct contact with the Mughal provincial administration, often reaped handsome material and political benefits by aligning with the latter. Many of them sought to emulate and appropriate aspects of a courtly, Persianized culture which they saw as a form of civilité and cosmopolitanism, and one that might help to better integrate them with a subcontinental polity and its nobility. This picture is at odds with the popular notion that the Bengali territorial aristocracy remained forever alienated and rebellious vis-à-vis the Mughals. It may indeed be time to re-examine the stereotype of the warring *bara bhuiyan*s as regional patriots. Chapter 7 also points to the manifest limitations of Persianization in early modern Bengal. Persianization coexisted with a vigorous regional, Brahminical culture which was not eroded by the former. However, it may be worthwhile to keep an open mind on the question as to whether and in what ways Brahminism in early modern Bengal may have been modified and influenced by Persianization. Persianization in early modern Bengal became an important element in the region's public and political culture, but one which may have had links also with other domains of culture. In my view, the use of Bengali materials from the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries has been critically important in reconstructing this picture both of historiographic practices in this region during the early modern era as well as the salience here—albeit with limits—of a Persianized culture. This suggests the need for the greater recognition and use of vernacular sources for the reconstruction of Mughal period history, particularly if it is to probe social and cultural phenomena.

This exercise in charting the manifestations of Persianization in certain types of Bengali historiography is valuable in terms of

studying the interactions between Islamicate culture and various Indic, regional, and local traditions. For example, the 1808 *Rajabali* of Mrityunjoy Bidyalankar is a fascinating juxtaposition of multiple literary, historiographic, and cultural traditions in a single narrative. It combines Puranic materials, Sanskrit courtly biographies, Persian tarikhs, and popular stories about Akbar in a single kaleidoscopic chronicle. This chronicle reinforces the fact that for certain facets of early modern Indian history, it is useful to keep an open mind about a much larger variety of cultural interactions than the biases of some kinds of late nineteenth and twentieth century scholarship are prepared to recognize.

Some of the most influential scholarship on the emergence of an Indian nationalist history in the later nineteenth century was based on the premise that it marked a sharp break with early modern modes of narrating the past.[6] It is undoubted that colonial education and the dissemination of the colonialist definition of history as empirical and scientific played a critical role in convincing the emergent colonial Indian literati that indigenous practices of recording the past did not deserve to be called history. But, it is over-simplifying the picture somewhat to posit that the older indigenous modes of history writing atrophied neatly and left the field open for the unchallenged practice of history as a specialized, scientific discipline. I argue that attributes associated with pre-modern historiography continued to make their presence felt in a variety of modes that were used to represent the past during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and continue to do so in contemporary times. The definition and understanding of history itself was highly contested even among the middle class intelligentsia. The kulagrantha controversy mentioned at the outset of this chapter sheds light on this subject.

A group of scholars represented by R.C. Majumdar and others challenged the historicity of the kulagranthas on the ground that they failed to meet rational-positivist standards. But another group of intellectuals, including Dinesh Chandra Sen, Nagendranath Basu and others advanced the view that these genealogies had been regarded for centuries by the people of Bengal as credible accounts of the region's Brahminical society and, therefore, they deserved to be recognized as history. These scholars conceptualized history as the product of a specific culture, rather than as a circumscribed academic discipline preoccupied with the application of a rational-positivist methodology to artefacts and texts from the past. This understanding of history rebelled against formal methodology, whether rational-positivist and western, or Indo-Islamic,

or Indic. In effect, Dinesh Chandra Sen and many other like-minded Bengali intellectuals of the time valorized an instinct and emotion-based, non-formal mode of remembering the past that was unfettered by methodology. We have noted above that early modern materials were not indifferent to methodology. However, early twentieth century intellectuals like Nagendranath Basu, Dinesh Chandra Sen, and others chose to de-emphasize the relevance of methodology in the materials they characterized as history. In taking such a stand, these Bengali scholars echoed the distinction between history and memory articulated by Halbwachs, Yarushalmi, and Nora which has been referred to in the Introduction. The former conceptualized history as a public concern rather than the concern of a few specialists. In this regard, they came closer to early modern notions and functions of history writing than the views of those who defined the modern practice of history as the sphere of highly specialized professionals. This romantic vision of history was not actually confined to one group of protagonists in the kulagrantha debate and had a broader appeal. It could count intellectuals of the stature of Rabindranath Tagore among its proponents.

The kulagrantha controversy projected two separate concepts of history—almost two disparate spheres of history. However, even adherents of modern, rational-positivist history at times deliberately allowed the boundaries between what they deemed to be 'proper' factual history to be infiltrated by stories and various kinds of vintage traditions which could not easily be accommodated under the new and modern definition of history. The travel account of Prasannamoyee Devi, a sophisticated, elite *bhadramahila* writer whose narrative *Aryavarta* was published in 1883, showcases such tendencies.[7] In the preface of her travel account, for example, Prasannamoyee Devi stated that she expected her daughter to emulate the examples of exemplary Indian women of the past such as Sita, Savitri, Damayanti, and Rani Lakshmibai. Here, a figure of the recent past, such as Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi, was bracketed with exemplary female figures from ancient Indian tradition for whom credible chronology and verifiable factual information of the kind mandated by the modern, professional practice of history was simply not available. This example forces us to recognize that while this period witnessed the inauguration of the modern, professional practice of history in India by scholars like R.C. Majumdar, H.C. Raychaudhuri, and Sir Jadunath Sarkar to name only a few, this kind of history had to exist in fairly close

communion with a vast field of what can be called popular and romantic history. Secondly, it raises the question of the function of history in a colonial society such as India during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

As Sudipta Kaviraj pointed out, history in the colonial Indian context functioned as something that could inspire a politically subordinate, morally discouraged subject people. If the past was to inspire and rejuvenate Indians, then cultural role models of the past could hardly be excluded from exercises of invoking the past for inspirational purposes.[8] Prasannamoyee Devi's travel account was quite different from formal works of rational, scientific history produced by professional historians. However, it was suffused with a strong historical enthusiasm and consciousness—fragments of historical fact were combined and co-mingled, as the occasion demanded, with stories, accounts, and traditions of cultural value and antiquity. This dimension of Prasannamoyee Devi's narrative allows us to place it alongside a large spectrum of literary and cultural productions of this time which were also shot through with a strong awareness of the past, but did not constitute history as defined by professional historians and archaeologists. Such literary/cultural productions included the large body of historical novels, plays, and others that were produced in abundance in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Bengal.

These cultural artefacts can be located under the rubric of what is regarded as romantic or popular history, or, in Sudipta Kaviraj's terms, 'fictionalized' or 'imaginary' history.[9] As the rich and insightful literature on the topic of romantic history reminds us, historical narratives constructed in accordance with the principles of rational positivism coexisted with other modes of representing the past as well—for example, through spectacles (such as waxworks), historical plays, novels, films, and paintings depicting scenes from history. The work of scholars such as Stephen Bann, Ann Rigney, and Maurice Samuels on the close connections between academic history and romantic or popular history in nineteenth century Britain and France demonstrates that a broader environment of historical awareness or interest had been created by and was at the same time manifest in cultural productions such as those mentioned above.[10] The novels of Sir Walter Scott, Victor Hugo, Alexandré Dumas, and other French romantics enjoyed phenomenal popularity, which underscored their ability to entertain and provide pleasure to a much larger audience than

just highly educated, trained professional historians or archaeologists. Thus, the historical cultures of even modern societies encapsulated academic history (or 'historiography proper' as many of them described it) and extended to include phenomena such as visual arts, historical novels, historical spectacles, and museums.[11] In fact, popular romantic history, with its ability to reach larger numbers of people, may well have been of critical importance in creating an overall environment of interest in the past. Modern, professional history could have come into being and functioned only against this backdrop.[12]

This sphere of imaginary, romantic, or popular history shared with the nativist conception of history espoused by Dinesh Chandra Sen, Nagendranath Basu, and others the character of being a non-specialist field in which emotion, imagination, and romance took centre stage. As illustrated in the substantive chapters of this book, many types of early modern historiography also embodied these attributes. Interestingly enough, several proponents of scientific history in early twentieth century Bengal—including Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyaya and Akshay Kumar Maitra, who were engaged in denouncing the historicity of the kulaji literature—were also authors of historical romances, both plays and novels.[13] This genre of imaginary history can be seen as a sphere in which 'real' historical personalities could be endowed with the nobility and virtues that rational, credible sources of history made difficult or impossible in academic history. Similarly, real historical events could be made to have imaginary, but more desirable outcomes. Yet, we must be careful not to completely blur the boundaries between professional history and archaeology, on the one hand, and popular, non-specialist, romantic history on the other. Professional historians and archaeologists, when writing for specialist, scholarly audiences, worked within the methodologies prescribed by their academic disciplines—they evaluated evidence, sought corroboration for discovered facts, and attempted to explain why one kind of evidence was more reliable than another. Even when some among them wrote imaginary history, it was kept apart from their scholarly work.

The endeavour here is to underscore the point that attributes associated typically with early modern historiographic practice have not atrophied with the advent of rational, scientific, academic history. These continue to exist in the interstices of popular historical writing, historical films, plays, and novels, sometimes challenging, sometimes corroborating the findings of professional historians.

Notes

1. For a detailed discussion of this debate, see K. Chatterjee, 'The King of Controversy: History and Nation-Making in Late Colonial India', *American Historical Review*, vol. 110, no. 5, 2005, pp. 1454–75. See also Gautam Bhadra, 'Itihase Smriti, Smritite Itihasa', *Bishwabharati Patrika*, 1401 BS, Sraban-Ashwin, pp. 134–42.

2. Gautam Bhadra, *Jaal Rajar Katha: Bardhamaner Pratapchand*, Calcutta, 2002, p. 33.

3. Bhadra, *Jaal Rajar Katha*, p. 155.

4. Ibid., p. 32.

5. Sumit Guha, 'Transitions and Translations: Regional Power and Vernacular Identity in the Dakhan, 1500–1800', pp. 23–31; Allison Busch, 'The Anxiety of Innovation: The Practice of Literary Science in the Hindi/*Riti* Tradition', pp. 45–59.

6. Partha Chatterjee, 'The Nation and it's Pasts', in *The Nation and its Fragments*, pp. 76–94 and 'Histories and Nations', ibid., pp. 95–115, as well as Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History*, for instance, exemplify this view.

7. K. Chatterjee, 'Discovering India: Travel, History, and Identity in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century India', in *Invoking the Past: The Uses of History in South Asia*, Daud Ali (ed.), New Delhi, 1999, pp. 192–227.

8. Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyaya and the Formation of Nationalist Discourse in India*, New Delhi, 1995.

9. Ibid.

10. The literature on this subject is large. The works I found most useful were Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clio: A Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth Century Britain and France*, Cambridge, 1984; Ann Rigney, *Imperfect Histories: The Elusive Past and the Legacy of Romantic Historicism*, Ithaca, NY, 2001; Maurice Samuels, *The Spectacular Past: Popular History and the Novel in Nineteenth Century France*, Ithaca, NY, 2004.

11. Bann, *The Clothing of Clio*, p. 3.

12. Ranajit Guha, *An Indian Historiography of India*; Gyanendra Pandey, 'The Prose of Otherness', in David Arnold and David Hardiman (eds), *Subaltern Studies VIII: Essays in Honour of Ranajit Guha*, New

Delhi, 1994, pp. 188–225, ignore the sphere of romantic history. A growing literature addresses the coexistence and tensions between academic history and romantic history. See for example, Sudipta Kaviraj, *The Unhappy Consciousness*; Tapati Guha Thakurta, *Monuments, Objects, Histories: Institutions of Art in Colonial and Post-Colonial India*, New York, 2004; Dipesh Chakrabarty, 'Romantic Archives: Literature and the Politics of Identity in Bengal', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 30, 2004, pp. 654–83 and others.

13. A.K. Bandyopadhyaya and B.N. Mukhopadhyaya (eds.), *Rakhaldas Bandyopadhyaya Rachanabali*, 2 vols, 1988–90, Calcutta; Akshay Kumar Maitra, *Phiringi Banik,* Calcutta, 1982 (rpt); Akshay Kumar Maitra, *Sirajuddaula,* Calcutta, 1983 (rpt).

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